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CHATTO AND WINDUS, PICCADILLY, W.

ANNAN WATER

A Romance

By ROBERT BUCHANAN

AUTHOR OF 'THE SHADOW OF THE SWORD,' 'GOD AND THE MAN,' 'A CHILD OF NATURE,' ETC.

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IN THREE VOLUMES

CHATTO AND WINDUS, PICCADILLY

1883

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DEDICATION.

This Romance, in certain pages of which an Englishwoman's noble work abroad, among her suffering sisters, is faintly shadowed forth, and which is partly founded on records made public by her, I dedicate with the deepest respect and admiration to

MISS LEIGH,

Of the English Mission,

Paris.

'I never bowed but to superior worth,
Nor ever failed in my allegiance *there!*'

ROBERT BUCHANAN.

October 27, 1883.

CONTENTS OF VOL. I.

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	TWO OLD BACHELORS	1
II.	'A GIFT FROM GOD'	25
III.	THE DEAD WOMAN	42
IV.	MARJORIE ANNAN	61
V.	HOMEWARD BOUND	78
VI.	THE WEAVER'S COTTAGE	97
VII.	AT THE MANSE	112
VIII.	THE CASTLE AND ITS MISTRESS	137
IX.	THE BAR SINISTER	158
X.	CAUSSIDIÈRE AND JOHN SUTHERLAND	175
XI.	A SCOTTISH SUNDAY	198
XII.	THE GREEN-EYED MONSTER	221
XIII.	CAUSSIDIÈRE FINDS A CLUE	239

ANNAN WATER.

CHAPTER I.

TWO OLD BACHELORS.

It was Martinmas Sunday. The evening service was just over, and the congregation, more than usually scanty, had dispersed itself over the Moss towards the various farms and bields which were scattered here and there upon it. A light still burned in the vestry, while Solomon Mucklebackit, the sexton, waited in the porch for the minister to come forth.

'There'll be snaw the night,' he muttered,

placing the key in the oaken door, preliminary to locking up; 'there'll be snaw the night, or I'm sair mista'en. And the Annan's rising—it's snawing noo amang the hills.'

So saying, he peered out into the dark night, looking inland, where black clouds were gathering and blotting out the faint rays of the full moon. The wind was crying, and blent with its cry was another fainter sound, that of the troubled Annan, which flowed seaward scarcely a stone's throw away.

Close to him, and to right and left of him, stretched the old kirkyard, in which he had been sexton, man and boy, for forty years. Here and there in the dimness flashed a tombstone, and everywhere the rough graves rolled like a sea. He looked out impa-

tiently, while a sudden gust of wind crossing the kirkyard struck the old church till it shook again, and died away like low thunder in the direction of the firth.

'What's keeping the meenister?' he murmured impatiently. 'It's time we were baith hame.'

As he spoke, there flitted before him on the grass-grown footpath something like a human figure, with a gleam of white like a dress fluttering in the wind.

'Wha's there?' he cried, starting nervously.

In a moment the figure vanished, disappearing along the footpath towards the church gate; and simultaneously a low moan, as of a human creature in pain, rose and died upon the chilly air.

Had Solomon been a superstitious man, instead of the most matter-of-fact of human creatures, he might have suspected something supernatural in a presence so mysterious, coming at such an hour and in such a place; but as it was, he simply grumbled to himself, audibly expressing his dislike of 'graceless hizzies' who came hanging about the sacred spot after dark. For the kirkyard was a favourite trysting and courting place of rural lovers of all ages, whose goings-on scandalized holier members of the population, especially Solomon the sexton, who was an old bachelor, and a misogynist into the bargain. To the cry of seeming agony he paid no heed, attributing it to the pranks of some one or other of the 'graceless hizzies' aforesaid, playing the ghost, and

trying to 'scaur' or fright the lawful custodian of the place.

All at once the light in the vestry was extinguished, and the minister, a man of about fifty years of age, appeared on the threshold, wrapt in a heavy winter cloak and carrying a thick staff.

'Lock up, Solomon, my man,' he said.

Solomon obeyed, turning the key in the inner door, and then that of the outer one of solid oak, while the minister stood waiting on the path. Then the two, side by side, and with much the same kind of mechanic trot, passed across the churchyard, pausing now and again to struggle with the fierce gusts, and to hold on their head-gear—the sexton his Sunday 'bonnet,' and the minister his broad-brimmed clerical hat.

Reaching the iron gate, which was rattling and creaking in the wind, they descended three moss-grown steps, and reached the highway. Here all was pitch-dark, for the shadow of tall yew-trees fell from the other side, deepening the nocturnal blackness; but, crossing the road, they opened another gate, crossed the garden where the yew-trees grew, and reached the door of the manse.

Standing here in complete shelter, they heard the 'sough' of the blast overhead among the tossing boughs, like the wild thunder of a stormy sea.

The manse was a plain two-story building, as old as the times of the Covenant, and containing numberless cheerless chambers, the majority of which were unfurnished. Here the Rev. Sampson Lorraine had dwelt

in solitude for five-and-twenty years. He had come to the place as a shy young bachelor, a student and a bookworm, and despite all the sieges that had been laid to his heart, as was inevitable in a place where marriageable men were few and spinsters many, a bachelor he had remained ever since. People said that a love disappointment in early life had made him thereafter invulnerable to all the charms of women, but at first his single condition made him very popular. Presently, however, as his position as a bachelor grew more confirmed, and his eccentricities increased, he ceased to awaken much interest. For the rest, he was a ripe, if somewhat pedantic, scholar, and a constant contributor to a journal of Scottish antiquities published from month to month in Edinburgh.

Opening the door with a latch-key, he entered a bare lobby, and striking a light, led the way into a large room on the ground-floor. It was scantily furnished with an old carpet, an old-fashioned circular table with drawers, and several chairs; but on the walls were numerous shelves, covered with books. The room had two large windows looking on the back lawn, which sloped down to the river, but was without curtains of any kind.

A fire burned on the hearth, and a rude box of peat fuel stood by the fireside. One side of the table was spread with a clean cloth, on which stood a tray with bread, oatcake, cheese, and butter, a large stone water-jug, a black bottle, and some glasses.

'Sit ye down, Solomon,' said the minister, placing a lighted candle on the table.

Solomon stood, hat in hand. Every Sunday evening for many a long year he had entered the house in the same way, at the same hour, and received the same invitation.

Seen in the dim light of the room, the sexton was a little, wizened, white-haired man, with hoary bushy eyebrows, keen grey eyes, and sunken, sun-tanned cheeks. He was dressed in decent black, with a white shirt, and the kind of collar known in Scotland as 'stick-ups.' The minister, on the other hand, was tall and somewhat portly, with a round, boyish face, gentle blue eyes, and mild good-humoured mouth. His hair was white as snow, and fell almost to his shoulders.

'Sit ye down, sit ye down,' he repeated; 'and take a glass—the night is cold.'

Solomon placed his bonnet carefully on the edge of the table, and seated himself respectfully on one of the cane-bottomed chairs. Then, leisurely and solemnly, he poured out a glass of raw spirit. Meantime Mr. Lorraine, having divested himself of his cloak and hat, sat down in the arm-chair by the fireside.

'Here's fortune, sir,' said Solomon, drinking off the whisky; then, wiping his mouth with his sleeve, he sat bolt upright and expectant, waiting if his superior had anything more to say.

'We had but a small gathering the night, Solomon,' observed the minister thoughtfully.

'Fifteen folk, no counting the bairns; but we hae preached to fewer. I mind last winter, when the snaw was on the groun', we had but three at afternoon service, forbye Mysie Simpson and mysel'.'

The minister laughed gently.

'I am afraid the new lights are too much for us,' he observed. 'Young Mr. Lauderdale up at the Knowes has, they tell me, a great congregation.'

Solomon drew himself up and gave a snort of contempt mingled with defiance.

'Sae ye had yoursel', when folk thought ye were a mairrying man, sir. I hae seen the auld kirk cramm'd to the door, and twa-thirds mairriageable lasses and their mithers; but noo it's a godless generation!'

The minister fixed his eye thoughtfully on the fire as he replied :

'I'm afraid we are behind the times, Solomon. We are both of us becoming old, and the young folk are growing up on every side. There's marrying and christening everywhere, and still we two remain alone. In a little while, Solomon, we shall be called to our account, without having known, either of us, the blessing that woman's love can give, or the comfort that comes with the cry of bairns.'

'Ye mind what St. Paul said, sir?' said the other doggedly—'and women are kittle cattle!'

'I suppose that's good philosophy, but it's small comfort, Solomon, my man. I think I should have been a happier man if I had married!'

The sexton smiled incredulously and shook his head; then, with as near an approach to a smile as his withered features could command, he said slily and sarcastically:

'It's never owre late to men', sir. You're a hale man yet, Lord kens; and three or fower I wat o' wad jest snap at ye! There's Miss Dalrymple o' the Mearns, and the Weedow Burness, and——'

'No, no, Solomon,' said Mr. Lorraine, laughing; 'you overrate my chances: and, whether or no, I'm far o'er old to try matrimony *now*. But it's a lonesome life, a lonesome life! Whenever I hear the schoolbairns crying in the street, I envy those that have little ones to dandle upon the knee. I have no kith or kin—nay, scarce a friend, in all the world.'

'Ye hae *me*, sir,' returned Solomon, in a low voice. 'No that I wad liken mysel' to a meenister and a scholar like yoursel'; but I hae been your clerk for nigh thirty years, and auld acquaintance is kindly, like clean linen. Atweel, is it no better to be a free man than to hae a scoldin' wife, or bairns that gang the deil's road, like mony i' the parish? And if you wad tak' a *gless* noo an' then to cheer your heart, you'd find it a better comforter than tane or tither!'

With this pregnant sentence Solomon rose to go, while Mr. Lorraine, without responding, continued to look dreamily at the fire.

'Are ye mindin' the funeral the morn?' the sexton asked, taking up his bonnet.

Mr. Lorraine nodded.

'Can I bring ye anything before I gang to bed? I maun rise at five to feenish the grave.'

'No; go to bed. I shall sit up and read a little.'

'Weel, good-night, sir.'

'Good-night, Solomon.'

Thereupon Solomon left the room, closing the door softly behind him. Lighting a candle in the lobby, he made his way quietly to a chamber in the upper part of the house, where he slept, and which was, indeed, the only chamber in the manse, excepting the minister's sitting-room and adjoining bedroom, which contained any furniture.

Many years before Solomon had taken up his abode there, on the minister's invitation, and it was his only home. Besides per-

forming the duties of sexton and clerk, he acted generally as factotum to Mr. Lorraine, attended to the garden, and groomed the pony on which the minister made his visitations about the country. An aged woman, Mysie Simpson, came in every day to clean and cook, but invariably retired to her own dwelling at nightfall. So the two old men were practically alone together, and, despite the difference in their social positions, regarded each other with a peculiar attachment.

The minister sat for some time musing, then with a sigh he took a book from the shelves and began to read. It was a volume of old sermons, written by a south-country clergyman, impassioned, wrathful, and in the narrow sense Calvinistic. As he read, the wind roared round the house, and

moaned in the chimneys, and rattled the shutterless windows; but as the wind rose the darkness decreased, and the vitreous rays of the moon began playing on the window panes.

Mr. Lorraine lit his pipe—the only luxury in which he indulged; for despite his plump figure, which he inherited, he was abstemious and a teetotaller. Then, with another sigh, he rose and walked thoughtfully up and down the room; paused at one of the windows, and looked down on the moonlighted lawn which sloped to the riverside; talking all the time to himself, as was his confirmed habit.

'Ay, ay, a wild night!—and snow coming, Solomon says! Eerie, eerie is the sough of the wind in the trees. It minds me ever of *her*, and when the moon's up it is

like the shining of her face out of the grave. Wee Marjorie! my bonnie doo! Thirty long years ago she died, and I'm still here! still here!'

Tears stood in the old man's eyes as he looked out in a dream. Through the long years of loneliness and poverty—for his living was indeed a poor one—he had cherished the memory of one who had gone away from him to God when only in her eighteenth year.

'She was a grand scholar, tho' a lassie and so young,' he murmured, after a pause. 'I taught her the Latin and the Greek, and she tried to teach me the French, but I was o'er blate to learn a new-fangled tongue. Marjorie! my own bonnie Marjorie!—I can hear her voice singing still, as when we were lass and lad.'

Presently he walked to the circular table, and unlocking a drawer, drew forth several old school-books and some sheets of time-worn music. He turned them over gently, like a man touching sacred things. One of the books was Xenophon's 'Anabasis,' another Ovid's 'Metamorphoses,' a third a book of French grammar and exercises; and on the fly-leaf of each was written in a pretty feminine hand the owner's name—'Marjorie Glen.' The same name was written on all the pieces of music but one, on which was inscribed, in faded ink and in the same hand, these words:—

'To dearest Sampson, with Marjorie's love.'

The piece was an old Scotch song of infinite beauty and pathos—the 'Land o' the Leal.'

He opened it, and read the words sadly, with the sweet old music ringing in his ear—

> 'I'm wearing awa', Jean,
> Like snaw when it's thaw, Jean,
> I'm wearing awa' to
> The Land o' the Leal!'

Alas! and nearly a lifetime had slipped away since the angels in that shining Land had beckoned, and the little hand had put down the sheet of music, and the loving heart had grown cold and still!

Close to the books and music, in a corner of the drawer, was a packet of old letters, bound with a silken ribbon which the writer had once worn in her hair. The old man took up the packet without opening it, and kissed it reverently; then, with streaming eyes, he knelt down before his chair, covered his face with his hands, and prayed.

'Marjorie! my pet! my bonnie doo!' he said aloud. 'Can you hear my voice calling you where you sit and sing among the angels of God? He took you from me when ye were little more than a bairn, and He left me to toil alone, though He gave me strength to thole my trouble and live on. You're a bairn still, my Marjorie, and I'm old, old; your hair's golden still, my pet, but mine is like the snow. Will you *ken* me when we meet at last? Ay, ay, it will be a strange meeting that—between an old, old man and a bairn! But though the body grows weak and old, the heart keeps young, and I love you still, my doo! May the Lord God that took you from me have you in His keeping, Marjorie, now and for evermore. Amen!'

Even as he knelt a white face was pressed

against the window pane, and two wild eyes looked in like the eyes of a spirit from another world. When he rose to his feet, still muttering to himself, they had vanished, but a minute after there came a loud single knock at the front door.

The minister started, listening, and the same moment a gust of unusual force shook the house to its foundation.

'Bless me, what's that?' he exclaimed. 'I thought I heard a knock at the hall door, but maybe my ears deceived me. It was only the wind, I'm thinking.'

And he placed his precious relics back in the drawer, locking it carefully, and placing the key in a worn leathern purse which he carried in his pocket.

At that moment the knock was repeated.

'Dear me!' he cried, 'there's some one

knocking after all. Maybe it's a sick call.'

Lifting the candle from the table, he trotted from the room, crossed along the lobby, and opened the hall door. As he did so the wind sprang in like a tiger, and the light was blown out, but the front garden was flooded with moonlight, save under the very shadow of the trees.

He saw nobody, however; whoever had knocked had disappeared.

'Who's there?' he cried, looking round on every side.

There was no reply.

Perplexed and somewhat startled, he stepped out into the porch, and instantaneously the door was banged and closed behind him. He took another step forward, and almost stumbled over something like

a dark bundle of clothing lying on the door-step.

'Bless my soul!' he murmured, 'what's this?'

At the same moment a faint cry came upon his ear. Stooping down in great agitation, he lifted the bundle, and discovered to his consternation that it contained the form of a living child.

CHAPTER II.

'A GIFT FROM GOD.'

A COARSE Paisley shawl was wrapt round the infant, covering all but a portion of its tiny face. As it lay like a mummy in its wrappings, it continued to cry loudly, and the cry went at once to the minister's tender heart.

But in a moment the old man guessed the truth—that the hapless creature had been left there by some one who had knocked and fled. Still holding the child in his arms,

he ran out in the garden and looked on every side.

'Come back!' he said; 'whoever you are, come back!'

But no one responded. The wind moaned dismally in the trees that lifted their black branches overhead, that was all. He ran to the gate and looked up and down the road; but could see nobody. As he stood in perplexity the child cried again loudly, and struggled in his arms.

'Bless me!' he murmured, 'I must take it in, or it will die of cold!'

He ran back to the door and knocked loudly again and again. It was some time before he was heard. At last, however, he heard footsteps coming along the passage, and redoubled his knocking. The door opened, and Solomon Mucklebackit, half

dressed, appeared on the threshold. Without a word the minister ran into the lobby.

'Losh me, meenister, is it yoursel'?' ejaculated Solomon in amazement. 'I thought you were in bed.'

'Come this way—quick!' shouted Mr. Lorraine. 'Bring a light!'

And still carrying his burthen, he ran into the sitting-room. Solomon closed the door, struck a match and lighted a candle, and followed him immediately. Then his amazement deepened. To see Mr. Lorraine standing by the fireside with a crying infant in his arms was indeed enough to awaken perplexity and wonder.

'My conscience, meenister, what hae ye gotten there?'

'A child! some one left it in the porch,

knocked, and ran away. Run, Solomon, search up and down the road, and see if you can find them. Shame upon them, whoever they are. Don't stand staring, but run.'

Perfectly bewildered, Solomon stood gaping; then, with one horror-stricken look at the infant, left the room, and ran from the house.

Left alone with the child, the minister seemed puzzled what to do. He held it awkwardly, and its cries continued; then, to still it, he rocked it to and fro in his arms.

Finding it still troublesome, he placed it down in the armchair, and softly loosened the shawl in which it was wrapt, freeing its little arms.

Its cries ceased for a time, and it lay with

eyes wide open, spreading its little hands in the warm twilight.

The minister put on his glasses and looked at it with solemn curiosity.

It was a tiny infant, about two months old; its little pink face was pinched with cold, and its great blue eyes dim with crying. A common linen cap was on its head, and its gown was of coarse linen. But it was so small, so pretty, that the minister's tender heart melted over it at once. He offered it his fore-finger, which it gripped with its tiny hands, blinking up into his face.

'Poor wee mite!' he murmured, 'I wonder who your mother is? A wicked woman, I'm thinking, to cast you away on such a night as this!'

As if in answer to the words, the child began to cry again.

'I can see naebody,' cried Solomon, re-entering the room; 'I hae searchit up and doon, as far toonways as Mysie Simpson's door, and beyont to the waterside, and there's nane stirring. It's awfu' strange!'

He looked at the child, and scratched his head; he looked at the minister, and nodded it ominously. A curious conjecture, too irreverent for utterance, had passed across his naturally suspicious mind.

The eyes of the two old men met: the minister flushed slightly, while Solomon's dry lips assumed the shape generally taken when one is about to give a prolonged whistle; but no sound followed.

'Whaur did your reverence find the bairn? on the doorstane, did you say?'

The minister nodded. Thereupon Solomon walked over to the chair, put on a pair

of brass-rimmed spectacles, and inspected the child much as his master had done, but with prolonged and dubious shakes of the head.

'Lord preserve us a'!' he muttered.

'Solomon,' cried Mr. Lorraine impatiently, 'what's to be done?'

Solomon scratched his head, then his face lightened with sudden inspiration, as he answered:

'Put the thing whaur ye found him, on the doorstane. Lea' him there—he's nane o' oors. Maybe the mither will come back and take him awa'.'

The minister's face flushed indignantly.

'On such a night as this! Solomon Mucklebackit, if you have no more Christian advice than that to offer, you can go back to bed.'

Solomon was astonished. Seldom had he seen his master exhibit such authority, tempered with indignation. Not knowing how to reply, he effected a diversion.

'See, sir,' he said, still inspecting the child as if it were some curious species of fish, 'the cratur's wringin' wat!'

Such was the fact, though it had escaped the minister's agitated scrutiny. The shawl and under-dress of the infant were soaked with rain or melted snow.

'Bless my soul!' cried Mr. Lorraine, bending down by Solomon's side; 'and its little body is quite cold. Fetch Mysie Simpson at once.'

Solomon shook his head.

'Mysie's away the night wi' her kinsfolk at the Mearns.'

'Then there's only one thing to be done,'

cried Mr. Lorraine with sudden decision. 'We must undress the child at once and put him to bed, and in the morning we can decide how to act. If we leave him like this he will die of cold.'

'Put him to bed!' echoed Solomon. 'Whaur?'

'In my room, Solomon, unless you would like to take him with you.'

'Wi' *me!* I'm no used wi' bairns! I couldna sleep a wink!'

'Then he shall stay wi' me! Look, Solomon, how pretty he is, how bright his eyes are! Fetch me a blanket at once, and warm it by the fire.'

Solomon left the room. The minister lifted the burthen in his arms and sat down by the hearth. Then, nervously and awkwardly, he undid the shawl and put it aside;

loosened the baby's outer garments, which were quite wet, and drew them gently off. Thus engaged, the good man was indeed a picture to see—his soft eyes beaming with love and tenderness, his face puzzled and troubled, his little plump hands at work with clumsy kindness.

Solomon entered with a blanket, warmed it for a minute at the fire, and then placed it softly under the child, which now lay mother-naked—as sweet and bright a little cherub as ever drew mother's milk.

Suddenly the sexton uttered an exclamation.

'Lord preserve us a'! It's no' a man-child ava! It's a wee lassie!'

Mr. Lorraine started, trembled, and almost dropped his load; then, bashfully and tenderly, he wrapped the warm blanket

round the infant, leaving only its face visible.

'Lad or lassie,' he said, 'the Lord has left it in our keeping!'

'But it is an awfu' responsibility! A woman-cratur' in oor hoose, meenister! We 'hae dwelt here thegither for nigh thirty years, and nane o' that sex has ever bided here, save auld Mysie when she comes to redd up the place. I'm thinkin' its the beginnin' o' trouble.'

Mr. Lorraine smiled; then, lifting the child in his arms, he kissed it on the cheek, adding with reverence:

'Suffer little children to come unto me, for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven.'

Stooping to the hearthrug, Solomon lifted from it a tiny chemise which had fallen there, and examined it with ludicrous

horror. Suddenly his eyes perceived something which had escaped Mr. Lorraine's nervous gaze. Pinned to the chemise was a piece of paper with some writing upon it.

'Look, meenister!' cried Solomon, unpinning the paper and holding it up, 'there's a letter addressed to yoursel' here. Will I read it?'

'Certainly.'

Then Solomon read, in his own broad accent, which we will not reproduce, these words, which were written in a clear though tremulous female hand:

To Mr. Lorraine,—

'*By the time you read this, the writer will be lying dead and cold in Annan Water. You are a good man and a clergyman. Keep the child, as the gift of God, and as you use her, may God use you!*'

That was all. Solomon stammered through the words in horror, while Mr. Lorraine listened in genuine astonishment.

'There, meenister!' exclaimed Solomon indignantly. 'Did I no' tell ye? It's a scandal, an outrage! Keep the bairn, indeed; and a woman-bairn! Absurd notion!'

'Hush, Solomon,' interposed the minister solemnly. 'I begin to see the hand of God in this.'

'The hand o' some brazen hizzie, meenister! Send the bairn to the workhouse.'

The minister frowned angrily.

'Solomon Mucklebackit, if these are your sentiments, be good enough to retire.'

'But, meenister——'

'I shall accept this trust. If, as is to be feared, the poor mother of this innocent

bairn should perish this night, I shall not neglect her last appeal.'

'Lord preserve us! You'll never keep the bairn?'

'That is to be seen. Be sure I will do what my conscience bids me. Listen to me, Solomon. When that knock came to the door, I was thinking of one who is long dead—one who for many years has been one of the angels of God; and my heart was full of its own loneliness, as you ken. And a little while before, Solomon, I was saying—do you mind?—how dreary a house is without the cry of bairns. Then the knock came, and I went to the door, and I found this little child abandoned by its mother. Solomon, if God Himself should have sent her to us to comfort our old age!'

As he spoke, the minister bent down

again and kissed the child, and his gentle eyes streamed with tears, while the light blue orbs of the infant looked up into his face. In spite of himself, Solomon was touched. He coughed violently to conceal his agitation.

'If it was a man-bairn, meenister, I shouldna mind sae much. But a lassie—a woman-bairn! It looks like the deil's wark!'

Mr. Lorraine laughed cheerily, and rose with the child in his arms. Lighted by Solomon, he passed into an adjoining room. a scantily furnished chamber, containing a plain bed and some common articles of furniture.

Opening the bedclothes, he placed the infant in a cosy spot, and arranged the blankets tenderly around it.

'Look Solomon! Is she not bonnie?'

Solomon gave a grunt of doubtful approval.

'Good-night, Solomon,' continued the minister.

A word of protest was on the sexton's tongue, but he checked it in time; then with one last stare of amazement, perplexity, and surprise, he left the room.

'The warl's comin' to an en',' he muttered, as he ascended the stairs to his room. 'A woman-bairn in oor hoose!—a lassie in the minister's ain bed! Weel, weel, weel!'

Meantime, Mr. Lorraine sat by the bedside, looking at the child, who had almost immediately fallen asleep. Presently he reached out his arm and took one of her little hands into his own, and his eyes were

dim and his soul was travelling back to the past. Hours passed thus, and he still sat in a dream.

'Marjorie, my bonnie doo!' he murmured aloud again. 'Is this indeed a gift from God—and *you?*'

CHAPTER III

THE DEAD WOMAN.

At five o'clock the next morning, when Solomon Mucklebackit, candle in hand, descended the stairs, he found the minister sitting by the bedside fast asleep, with his grey head resting on the side of the pillow, and his right arm outstretched over the counterpane above the still slumbering child. At the sound of Solomon's entrance, however, Mr. Lorraine awoke at once, rubbed his eyes, and looked in a

dazed way around him; then his eyes fell upon the infant, and his face grew bright as sunshine.

'Bless me, meenister! Hae ye been watching *here* a' nicht?'

'I fell to sleep,' was the reply, 'and I was dreaming, Solomon, such bonnie dreams! I thought that I was up yonder among the angels, and that one of them came to me with a face I well remember—ah, so bright!—and put a little bairn—*this* bairn—into my arms; and then, as I held the pretty one, a thousand voices sang an old Scotch song, the "Land o' the Leal." Dear me!—and it is nearly daybreak, I suppose?'

Solomon did not reply in words, but, pulling up the blind, showed the outer world still dark, but trembling to the first

dim rays of wintry dawn, while snow was thickly falling, and the garden was covered with a sheet of virgin white. The minister rose shivering, for the air was bitter cold; his limbs, too, were stiff and chilly.

'What's to be done now?' asked Solomon gloomily. 'I maun awa' an' feenish the grave, but Mysie will be here at six.'

'I will watch until Mysie comes,' answered Mr. Lorraine; then, bending over the bed, he continued: 'See, Solomon, my man, how soundly she sleeps, and how pretty she looks!'

Solomon grunted, and moved towards the door.

'Will I put on the parritch mysel'?' he demanded. 'Ye maun be wanting something after sic a night.'

'Nothing, nothing. Go on to the kirk-yard.'

An hour later, when the old woman appeared, having let herself in by a key at the back door, she was at once apprised of the situation. Having learned by old habit to keep her thoughts to herself, and being of kindly disposition, and the mother of a large grown-up family, she at once, without questioning, entered upon her duties as nurse. The child having wakened, crying, she took it up in her arms and hushed it upon her bosom, where it soon became still; then, passing to the kitchen, she warmed some new milk, and fed it with a spoon.

The minister looked on with a puzzled smile.

'See, sir,' she said, 'hoo she tak's the milk frae the coo! She's been rearit by

hand, and has never tasted the briest; but without a bottle to drink frae she'll never leeve.'

By this time day had broken; and when he had seen the child comfortably cared for, the minister put on his cloak and walked forth to make inquiries. He found the air still thick with snow, which lay ankle-deep upon the ground, and all the lonely landscape wore that infinitely forlorn and dreary aspect which only comes in time of winter storm. In the distance, inland, the hills loomed white and dim; snow covered the fields and draped the hedges and leafless trees; and snow was drifted knee-deep on the leeward side of the ice-bound road. Passing up townward, he reached the few scattered cottages on the skirts of the village, and met several farm

labourers going sleepily to work. From them he could gather no information, and he repeated his inquiries from door to door with the same result.

The village consisted of one straggling street with numerous small cottages, a few poverty-stricken shops, and a one-storied tavern. Jock Steven, who kept the latter, was standing on the threshold with a drowsy stare, having just thrown open the door; and on questioning him Mr. Lorraine gained his first and only piece of information. A woman, a stranger to the place, had entered the inn over night, carrying an infant underneath her shawl, and had asked for a glass of milk, which she had drunk hastily and flitted away—like a ghost. Her face was partially hidden, but Jock was certain that she was a stranger.

Stay! yes, there was something more. She had inquired for the manse, and the innkeeper had pointed out the direction of the church and the minister's abode.

Further inquiries up and down the village elicited no further information. Several other individuals had seen the stranger, but none knew her, and little attention had been paid her. Mr. Lorraine was more and more puzzled. It seemed quite clear, however, that the woman had come thither of set purpose and by no mere accident, and that her intention had been to abandon her infant, leaving it under the minister's protection. Who could she be? What wind of utter despair had wafted her to that place, of all places, and to *his* door, of all doors? He racked his brain to think of any one of his parishioners whom he

could connect with the mystery, but the attempt was useless. Then with a shudder of horror he thought of the words of the paper which Solomon had found pinned to the child's garment. By that time, in all probability, the body of the wretched mother was lying at the bottom of Annan Water, while her sinful soul was face to face with its Eternal Judge.

Perplexed and weary, the good man trotted back to the manse. Here, in the rudely furnished kitchen, he found a bright fire burning, his breakfast ready, and Mysie seated by the ingleside with the child in her lap, in voluble conversation with the old sexton.

In answer to their eager questions, he only shook his head; then sitting down at the wooden table, he took his simple

meal of oatmeal-porridge, with tea and bread to follow.

'Have you finished the grave, Solomon?' he asked presently.

'I hae feenished the grave,' answered Solomon, 'and I wish the wicked hizzie, the mither o' that bairn, was lying in it, though I sair misdoot she's nae Christian cratur'. May the deil grip her and punish her for bringing her ill deeds to oor door!'

'Hush, Solomon!' said Mr. Lorraine; 'it is not for us to pass judgment upon her, or wish her harm. Perhaps, after all, she is more sinned against than sinning. God help her, and I forgive her, whoever she is!'

Solomon shook his head savagely, and grunted in deprecation.

'It's a crying shame, and a scandal to the parish!' he exclaimed. 'We canna keep the bairn!'

'We *shall* keep her,' replied the minister thoughtfully. 'As I told you before, Solomon, my man, I begin to see the hand of God in this. If, as I fear, and as she has threatened, the miserable woman has destroyed herself, we must sooner or later discover who and what she is; but till then I must accept the sacred trust.'

'It's the way wi' them a', meenister,' cried the sexton stubbornly. 'They impose upon you, kenning your heart is owre tender.'

Mr. Lorraine smiled gently as he responded:

'I am glad that they think so well of me. I should have a hard heart indeed if I

had neither love nor pity for this motherless bairn.'

The wretched mother, whoever she was, had indeed chosen wisely when she had resolved, while determining to abandon her infant, to leave it at the gentle minister's door. Days passed, and in spite of Solomon's protestations, it was still an inmate of the manse. Mysie Simpson understood the rearing process well, and since the child, as she had surmised, had never known the breast, it throve well upon 'the bottle.' The minister went and came lightly, as if the burthen of twenty years had been taken from his shoulders; had it indeed been his own offspring he could not have been more anxious or more tender. And Solomon Mucklebackit, despite his assumption of

sternness and indignation, was secretly sympathetic. He, too, had a tender corner in his heart, which the child's innocent beauty did not fail to touch.

Of course, this extraordinary affair at once became the talk of the parish, as Solomon had predicted, and there were not wanting evil tongues to say that the old minister had good reasons for accepting the office of foster-father and protector. Of the passing scandal, which no one really believed, but which was passed freely enough from mouth to mouth, Mr. Lorraine heard nothing; but Solomon heard it, and was righteously indignant. However, Solomon was a wight of stubborn disposition, and the reflections on his master's character only succeeded in making him a partizan of the pretty cause of them all. Before a week

had passed he had begun to exhibit a sort of self-satisfied paternity very curious to observe.

One morning, some seven or eight days after the arrival of the infant, when the storms had blown themselves hoarse, and a dull black thaw had succeeded the falling and drifting snow, news came to the manse that the body of a woman had been found lying on the brink of the Annan, just where its waters meet the wide sands of the Solway, and mingle with the salt streams of the ocean tide. Greatly agitated, Mr. Lorraine mounted his pony, and at once rode along the lonely highway which winds through the flat reaches of the Moss. Arriving close to the great sands, he was directed to a disused outbuilding or barn, belonging to a large sea-facing farm, and

standing some hundred yards above high water-mark. A group of fishermen and peasant men and women were clustered at the door; at his approach the men lifted their hats respectfully, and the women courtesied.

On making inquiries, the minister learnt that the body had been discovered at day-break by some salmon fishers, when netting the river that morning's tide. They had at once given the alarm, and carried 'it' up to the dilapidated barn where it was then lying.

The barn was without a door, and partially roofless. Day and night the salt spray of the ocean was blown upon it, encrusting its black sides with a species of filmy salt; and from the dark rafters and down the broken walls clung slimy weeds

and mosses; and over it a pack of sea-gulls wheeled and screamed.

The minister took off his hat and entered in bareheaded.

Stretched upon the earthen floor was what seemed at first rather a shapeless mass than a human form; a piece of coarse tarpaulin was placed over it, covering it from head to foot. Gently and reverently, Mr. Lorraine drew back a corner of the tarpaulin and revealed to view the disfigured lineaments of what had once been a living face; but though the features were changed and unrecognisable, and the eye sockets were empty of their shining orbs, and the mouth disfigured and hidden by foulness, the face was still set in a woman's golden hair.

With the horror deep upon him, the

minister trembled and prayed. Then, drawing the covering still lower, he caught a glimpse of a delicate hand clutched as in the agonies of death; and sparkling on the middle finger thereof was a slender ring of gold.

'God forgive me!' he murmured to himself; 'if this is the mother of the child, I did her a cruel wrong.'

He stood gazing and praying for some time, his eyes dim with sympathetic tears; then, after replacing the covering reverently, he turned away and passed through the group which clustered, watching him, at the door.

The day following there was a simple funeral, in a solitary burial-place, seldom used, and lying within a short distance of the spot where the body was found. Mr.

Lorraine defrayed the expenses out of his own pocket, saw that everything was decently though simply arranged, and himself read the beautiful burial service over the coffin. He had now no doubt in his mind that the drowned woman was the mother of the infant left under his care, and that by destroying herself she had simply carried out her desperate determination.

All attempts to identify her, however, continued without avail. Inquiries were made on every side, advertisements inserted in the local newspapers, without the slightest result; no one came forward to give any information. But by this time the minister's mind was quite made up. He would keep the child, and, with God's blessing, rear her as his own; he would justify

the unhappy mother's dependence on his charity and loving-kindness.

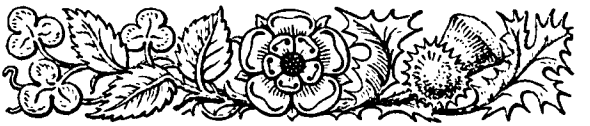
So it came to pass that late in the gloaming of the old bachelor's life the cry of a child was heard in the lonely house; and somehow or other, despite Solomon Mucklebackit's prognostications, the house became brighter and merrier for the sound. Solomon himself soon fell under the spell, and when a little warm with whisky he would allude to the child, with a comic sense of possession, as 'oor bairn.'

At last, one day, there was a quiet christening in the old kirk, where Mr. Lorraine had officiated so many years. Mysie held the infant in her arms, while Solomon stood at hand blinking through his horn spectacles, and the minister performed the simple ceremony.

After long and tender deliberation the minister had fixed upon a name, which he now gave to the poor little castaway, who had neither father nor mother, nor any other kinsfolk in the world after whom she could be called.

He christened her *Marjorie Annan.*

Marjorie, after that other beloved Marjorie, who had long before joined—or so he dreamed—the bright celestial band; *Annan*, after that troubled water wherein the miserable mother had plunged and died.



CHAPTER IV.

MARJORIE ANNAN.

On a bright morning of early spring, between sixteen and seventeen years after the events described in the first chapters of this story, a golden-haired young girl might have been seen tripping down the High Street of the market town of Dumfries. Her dress was prettily if not over-fashionably cut, a straw hat shaded her bright blue eyes, and her boots and gloves were those of a lady. Under her arm she

carried several books—school books, to all intents and purposes.

By her side, talking to her eagerly, was a young man about three years her senior.

From time to time as she tripped along with her companion she had to stop and exchange words with passers-by who greeted her by name; and from many of the shop doors and windows friendly heads nodded and bright faces beamed. It was clear that she was well known in the little town, and a general favourite. Indeed, there were few of the residents within a radius of ten miles round Dumfries who did not know something of Marjorie Annan, the foster-child and adopted daughter of Mr. Lorraine.

Her companion, John Sutherland, was

fair complexioned and very pale. He was plainly clad in a suit of dark tweed, and wore a wideawake hat. His whole aspect betokened delicate health, and there was a sad light in his large blue eyes which told of a thoughtful spirit lodging within. His manners were gentle and retiring in the extreme.

'When did you come back, Johnnie?' Marjorie had asked after some previous conversation.

'Last night, by the express from London,' answered the young man. 'I'm going down to see the old folk to-night. Shall you be at the manse?'

Marjorie nodded, smiling gaily.

'And how did you like London?' she demanded. 'Did you see the Queen? and Westminster Abbey? and did you go to

the great Tabernacle to hear Spurgeon preach?'

'No, Marjorie. My time was short, and most of my spare time was spent among the pictures; but when I saw them, thousands upon thousands of masterpieces, it made me despair of ever becoming a painter. I thought to myself, maybe it would be better after all to bide at home, and stick to weaving like my father.'

As he spoke, Marjorie paused at the corner of a quiet street, and held out her hand.

'I must go to my lesson. Good-bye!'

'How are you going down? By the waggonette?'

'Yes, Johnnie.'

'So am I; so we can go together. Good-bye till then!'

And with a warm squeeze of the hand the young man walked away. Marjorie stood looking after him for a moment with a pleasant smile; then she turned and walked down the street. She had not many yards to go before she paused before a dingy-looking house, on the door of which was a brass plate with the inscription:

M. Léon Caussidière,
Professor of Languages.

She rang the bell, and the door was opened almost immediately by a Scotch servant in petticoat and short gown, who greeted her with a familiar smile. Answering the smile with a friendly nod, Marjorie tripped along the lobby, and knocked at an inner door, which stood ajar. A clear

musical voice, with an unmistakably foreign accent, cried, 'Come in,' and she entered.

The room was a plainly furnished parlour, at the centre table of which a young man sat writing. The table was littered with writing materials, books, and journals, and on a smaller table in the window recess was another table, also strewn with books.

The young man, who was smoking a cigarette, looked up as Marjorie entered.

'Ah, it is you, Mademoiselle Marjorie!' he exclaimed, smiling pleasantly. 'I did not expect you so early, and I was just smoking my cigarette. You do not mind the smoke? No? Then, with your permission, I will smoke on.'

He spoke English fluently, though his accent was unmistakable, and his pronuncia-

tion of certain words peculiar. Personally, he was tall and handsome, with black hair worn very long, black moustache, and clean-shaven chin. His forehead was high and thoughtful, his eyes bright but sunken, his complexion swarthy. He was dressed shabbily, but somewhat showily, in a coat of brown velvet, shirt with turn-down collar loose at the throat, and a crimson tie shapen like a true-lover's knot. He carried a *pince-nez*, secured to his person by a piece of elastic, disused while writing or reading, but fixed on the nose at other times. Through this *pince-nez* he now regarded Margorie with a very decided look of admiration.

'I came early, monsieur,' said Marjorie, 'because I cannot come in the afternoon. I am going home, and I shall not be back in

Dumfries till Monday. Can you give me my lesson *now*, please?'

'Certainly,' answered the Frenchman. 'I was only writing my French correspondence, but I can finish that when you are gone. Will you sit there, mademoiselle, in the armchair? No? Then in this other? We will begin at once.'

Marjorie sat down and opened her books. The Frenchman, taking the armchair she had refused, regarded her quietly and keenly.

'Now read, if you please,' he said, with a wave of the hand. 'Begin—where you left off yesterday.'

Marjorie obeyed, and read aloud in a clear voice from an easy French reading-book. From time to time the teacher interrupted her, correcting her pronunciation.

'You advance, mademoiselle,' he said presently. 'Ah, yes, you are so quick, so intelligent. Now translate.'

In this portion of her task also the girl acquitted herself well, and when she had finished, the young man nodded approvingly.

'Now let us converse—in French, if you please.'

But here Marjorie was at a loss, not knowing what to talk about. She finally took the weather as a topic, and advanced the proposition that it was a very fine day, but that there would soon be rain. Her master responded, and, urged to higher flights of imagination, Marjorie hoped that it would not rain till she reached home, as the public waggonette in which she was to travel was an open one, and she did not

want to get wet. In this brilliant strain the conversation proceeded, Marjorie stumbling over the construction of her sentences, and getting very puzzled over the other's voluble answers when they extended to any length. But at last the lesson was over, and the teacher expressed himself well pleased.

'And now,' he said, with a smile, 'we will talk the English again before you go. Will you tell me something more about yourself, mademoiselle? I have seen you so often, and yet I know so little. For myself, I am almost a recluse, and go about not at all. Tell me, then, about yourself, your guardian, your home.'

'I don't know what to tell you, monsieur,' answered Marjorie.

'Call me not "monsieur," but "Mon-

sieur Léon." "Monsieur" is so formal—so cold.'

'Monsieur Léon.'

'That is better. Now answer me, if you please. You have no father, no mother?'

The girl's eyes filled with tears.

'No, monsieur——'

'Monsieur Léon.'

'No, Monsieur Léon.'

'Ah, that is sad—sad to be an orphan, alone in the world! I myself have no father, but I have a mother whom I adore. And you live with your guardian always?'

'Yes, monsieur—Monsieur Léon. He is my guardian and my foster-father; and Solomon is my foster-father too.'

'Solomon?'

'Solomon is our clerk and sexton. He

lives in the manse. He was living there when the minister found me, nearly seventeen years ago.'

The young Frenchman had arisen, and stood facing Marjorie Annan.

'Ah, yes, I have heard!' he said. 'And you have dwelt all these years, *mignonne*, alone with those two old men?'

'Yes, Monsieur Léon.'

'It is terrible—it is not right! You, who are so young and pretty; they, who are so old and dreary! And you have never seen the world—never travelled from your native land! Never? You have lived in a desert, you have never known what it is to live! But you are a child, and it is not too late. You will see the world some day, will you not? You will find some one to love you, to care for you, and you will bid

adieu to this *triste* Scotland, once and for ever!'

As he spoke, very volubly, he bent his face close to hers, smiling eagerly, while his breath touched her cheek. She blushed slightly, and drooped her eyes for a moment; then she looked up quite steadily, and said:

'I should not care to leave my home. Mr. Lorraine took me to Edinburgh once, but I soon wearied, and was glad to come back to Annandale.'

'Edinburgh!' cried Monsieur Léon, with a contemptuous gesture. 'A city where the sun never shines, and it rains, six days out of the seven, what you call a Scotch mist! You should see my country, *la belle France*, and Paris, the queen of the cities of the world! There all is light and gay; it

is Paradise on earth. Would you not like to see Paris, Mademoiselle Marjorie?'

'Yes, monsieur, maybe I should,' replied Marjorie; 'but I'm not caring much for the town. But I was forgetting something, though,' she added. 'Mr. Lorraine told me to give you this.'

So saying, she drew forth a small silk purse, and drawing thence two sovereigns, placed them on the table.

'Put them back in your purse, if you please.'

'But I have not paid you anything, and I owe you for ten lessons.'

'Never mind that, mademoiselle,' answered the Frenchman. 'Some other time, if you insist, but not to-day. It is reward enough for me to have such a pupil. Take

the money and buy yourself a keepsake to remind you of me.'

But Marjorie shook her little head firmly as she answered :

'Please do not ask me, Monsieur Lëon. My guardian would be very angry, and he sent me the money to pay you.'

The Frenchman shrugged his shoulders.

'Well, as you please; only I would not have you think that I teach you for the money's sake—ah, no! You have brought light and sunshine to my heart in my exile; when you come I forget my sorrows, and when you go away I am full of gloom. Ah, you smile, but it is true!'

'Good-bye, now, Monsieur Léon,' said Marjorie, moving towards the door, for she felt embarrassed and almost frightened by the ardent looks of her teacher.

'Good-bye! You will come again on Monday, will you not?'

'Yes, Monsieur Léon.'

And Marjorie left the room and passed out into the sunny street.

Left to himself, the Frenchman threw himself into his chair, and covering his eyes with his delicate white hands, seemed to reflect deeply for some minutes. When he looked up again his eyes were full of eager, passionate light.

'How pretty she is—how pure and sweet!' he murmured to himself in his own tongue. 'Though she is a child, she has brought me to her feet; and I, who used to say that I was sick of love, and cared only for Liberty and France! Every day that I look upon her I love her more. And she? Does she care for me, her teacher? Will she listen if

I ask her to leave this gloomy land, and fly with me to a merrier home? The great change grows near—soon, perhaps, I shall be no longer in exile—I can return, and I will not return *alone*.'

CHAPTER V.

HOMEWARD BOUND.

THE public waggonette in which Marjorie was to journey home ran daily between Dumfries and Annanmouth, a small seaside village much frequented in summer for its sea-bathing, and passed within half-a-mile of Mr. Lorraine's abode, which was just six Scots miles away from Dumfries itself. The starting-place was the Bonnie Jean Commercial Inn, an establishment said to have been much patronized by the poet Burns during his residence in the south of Scot-

land; and hither Marjorie, after leaving her tutor, proceeded without delay.

The waggonette stood waiting at the door, and on the threshold—smiling, smart, and spruce—were the Misses Dalrymple, Maggie and Annie, the two severe maidens who kept the inn. Miss Maggie was about forty-five years of age, Miss Annie about forty; both were somewhat grim and aquiline of feature, but simple, hospitable, and kindly. Miss Maggie dressed severely in sober colours, with little or no ornament of any kind; but Miss Annie, presuming upon her greater youthfulness, affected cheerful embellishments, had always a light kerchief in her bosom, and gay ribbons in her cap.

At Marjorie's appearance their features grew radiant with friendliness.

'You're jest in time, Marjorie!' cried Miss Maggie. 'Tam has gane doun for the post bag.'

'Come awa' ben,' said Miss Annie; 'you'll tak' something before you gang.'

So saying, they led her into a cosy parlour behind the bar or office, wherein the sisters presided over the hotel books and made up their accounts. Over the parlour mantelpiece was a picture in oil of Robert Burns, taken at the period of his physical decline, and looking worn, weary, and old; and in a small glass frame below was a kind of posy made of dried flowers, meadow grass, and ferns, with the inscription :—'*Gathered at Mauchline, July*, 18—.'

The two good ladies placed Marjorie in the arm-chair, and while plying her with questions, and amusing her with local gossip,

looked at her with undisguised admiration; for they were not so sour of disposition as to regard a pretty face, even in one of their own sex, with anything but sympathetic admiration. Presently, after general topics were disposed of, Miss Annie said:

'Hae ye seen Johnnie Sutherland, yet? He's back frae London.'

'Yes; and he's going down in the waggonette,' answered Marjorie.

Miss Annie exchanged a hurried glance with her sister, and smiled on Marjorie.

'He's a good lad and a clever,' she exclaimed. 'I mind the time when he and you gaed cleeking thegither to the school. Dae ye mind that, Marjorie?'

'I mind it fine,' answered Marjorie, with a slight blush. 'He was very good to me, and often helped me with my lessons.'

'And he wad draw yer picture all over his books!—dae ye mind *that?* Eh, Marjorie, he was awfu' fond o' ye when a bairn, and I'm thinking he's fonder o' ye noo he's a man.'

'Aye is he,' said Miss Maggie, with an affirmative nod of the head.

'He's like 'my own brother,' replied Marjorie simply.

The ladies of the inn exchanged another glance; then Miss Annie changed the subject.

'And hoo are ye getting on wi' the French, Marjorie? He's a strange man, yon Frenchman, and the toon's talk. They're saying he wad be rich if he had his rights, but that the Emperor has banished him frae France on account o' his poleetical opinions.'

'Yes, he has told me so,' replied Marjorie. 'I like him very much, he is so clever and so kind.'

'He hasna many scholars,' said Miss Maggie thoughtfully, 'and most o' them he has are lads. Hoo came *you* to gang till him, Marjorie?'

'I wanted to learn the French, and Mr. Lorraine saw his name in the paper, so it was settled that I should go to him for an hour a day, four days a week.'

At this moment Tam the driver appeared at the door, announcing that the waggonette was about to start; and Marjorie, after a kiss from each of the sisters, hastened to take her place. The vehicle was drawn by two powerful horses, and could accommodate a dozen passen-

gers inside and one more on the seat of the driver; but to-day there were only a few going—three farmers and their wives, a sailor on his way home from sea, and a couple of female farm servants who had come in to the spring 'hiring.' All these had taken their seats, but John Sunderland stood by the trap waiting to hand Marjorie in. She stepped in and took her place, and the young man found a seat at her side, when the driver took the reins and mounted to his seat, and with waves and smiles from the Misses Dalrymple, and a cheer from a very small boy on the pavement, away they went.

The highway ran out of the market town until it reached sunny fields, where the corn was sprouting, and the larks

were singing, past pleasant stretches of meadow, quiet clumps of woodland, comfortable farms, with glimpses all along of the distant mountains of Kirkcudbrightshire, and occasional peeps of the waters of the Solway, sparkling in the sunlight. Tam the driver chatted merrily with his passengers as he cracked his whip and rattled along, and had a nod and a greeting for the driver of every vehicle that passed, whether it was a slow country waggon, or a doctor's smart dog-cart, or a minister's wife driving her pony-chaise. Meanwhile John Sutherland and Marjorie talked in a low voice together of old times; the girl happy, unconstrained, and little conscious of the admiration in the young man's earnest eyes.

At last they reached the cross-roads

where John and Marjorie were to alight. They leapt out, and pursued their way on foot, the young man carrying a small hand valise, Marjorie still holding her school-books underneath her arm.

How still and bright it was, that afternoon of early spring! How fresh was the air, how blue and peaceful the quiet sky! Their way lay along a quiet country road, the banks of which were sprinkled thick with speedwells and primroses, while the hedges were tangled with wild rose-bushes just preparing to bloom. Often in after years, when trouble came, John Sutherland thought of that happy walk, of his own blissful thoughts and dreams, and of the pretty figure tripping so gracefully and talking so pleasantly by his side!

Presently they came to a two-arched bridge which spanned the Annan. They paused just above the keystone. The young man rested his valise on the mossy wall, and both looked thoughtfully down at the flowing stream. A heron which was playing Narcissus in a pool twenty yards below the bridge, standing with crooked neck in solemn contemplation of his own blue shade, opened his great wings leisurely and flitted slowly away.

'It's many a long year, Marjorie, since we first stood here. I was a bare-footed callant, you were a wean scarce able to run; and now I'm a man, and you're almost a woman. Yet there's the Annan beneath us, the same as ever, and it will be the same when we're both old—always the same.'

Marjorie turned her head away, and her eyes were dim with tears.

'Come away,' she said; 'I cannot bear to look at it! Whenever I watch the Annan I seem to see my mother's drowned face keeking up at me out of the quiet water.'

The young man drew closer to her, and gently touched her hand.

'Don't greet, Marjorie!' he murmured softly; 'your poor mother's at peace with God.'

'Yes, Johnnie, I ken that,' answered the girl in a broken voice; 'but it's sad, sad, to have neither kith nor kin, and to remember the way my mother died—aye, and not even to be able to guess her name! Whiles I feel very lonesome, when I think it all o'er.'

'And no wonder! But you have those

that love you dearly, for all that. There's not a lady in the country more thought of than yourself, and wherever your bonnie face has come it has brought comfort.'

As he spoke he took her hand in his own, and looked at her very fondly; but her own gaze was far away, following her wistful thoughts.

'You're all very good to me,' she said presently, 'Mr. Lorraine, and Solomon, and all my friends; but, for all that, I miss my own kith and kin.'

He bent his face close to hers, as he returned:

'Some day, Marjorie, you'll have a house and kin of your own, and then——'

He paused blushing, for her clear, steadfast eyes were suddenly turned full upon his face.

'What do you mean, Johnnie?'

'I mean that you'll maybe marry, and——'

Brightness broke through the cloud, and Marjorie smiled.

'Marry? Is it me? It's early in the day to think of *that*, at seventeen!'

'Other young lasses think of it, Marjorie, and so must you. Our Agnes married last Martinmas, and she was only a year older than yourself.'

Marjorie shook her head, then her face grew sad again, as her eyes fell upon Annan water.

'I'm naebody's bairn,' she cried, 'and shall be naebody's wife, Johnnie.'

'Don't say that, Marjorie,' answered Sutherland, still holding her hand and pressing it fondly. 'There's one that loves

you dearer than anything else in all the world.'

She looked at him again steadfastly, while his face flushed scarlet.

'I know *you* love me, Johnnie, as if you were my own brother.'

'More than *that*, Marjorie—more a thousand times!' the young man continued passionately. 'Ah! it has been on my mind a thousand times to tell you how much. Ever since we were little lass and lad you've been the one thought and dream of my life; and if I've striven hard and hoped to become a painter, it has all been for love of *you*. I know my folk are poor, and that in other respects I'm not a match for you, who have been brought up as a lady, but there will be neither peace nor happiness for me in

this world unless you consent to become my wife.'

As he continued to speak she had become more and more and more surprised and startled. The sudden revelation of what so many people knew, but which she herself had never suspected, came upon her as a shock of sharp pain; so that when he ceased, trembling and confused by the vehemence of his own confession, she was quite pale, and all the light seemed to have gone out of her beautiful eyes as she replied:

'Don't talk like that! You're not serious! Your wife! I shall be "naebody's wife" as I said, but surely, surely not yours.'

'Why not mine, Marjorie?' he cried, growing pale in turn. 'I'll work day and night, I'll neither rest nor sleep until I have a home fit for you! You shall be a lady!—

O Marjorie, tell me you care for me, and will make me happy!'

'I do care for you, Johnnie; I care for you so much that I can't *bear* to hear you talk as you have done. You have been like my own brother, and now——'

'And now I want to be something nearer and dearer. Marjorie, speak to me; at least tell me you're not angry!'

'Angry with you, Johnnie?' she replied, smiling again, and giving him both hands. 'As if I *could* be! But you must be very good, and not speak of it again.'

She disengaged herself and moved slowly across the bridge. He lifted his valise and followed her anxiously.

'I know what it is,' he said sadly, as they went on side by side together. 'You think

I'm too poor, and you would be ashamed of my folk.'

She turned her head and gazed at him in mild reproach.

'Oh, how can you think so hardly of me? I love your mother and father as if they were my own; and as for your being poor, I shouldn't like you at all if you were rich. But,' she added gently, 'I like you as my brother best.'

'If I could be always even *that* I should not mind; but no, Marjorie, you're too bonnie to bide alone, and if any other man came and took you from me, it would break my heart.'

'What nonsense you talk!' she exclaimed, smiling again. 'As if any other man would care. If I were twenty, it would be time enough to talk like that; but at seventeen

—Oh, Johnnie, you almost make me laugh!'

'"'Tell me one thing,' he persisted; 'tell me you don't like any one better than you like me.'

'I don't like any one half so well, except, except—Mr. Lorraine.'

'You are sure, Marjorie?'

'Quite sure.'

'Then I'll bide my time and wait.'

By this time the village was in sight, and they were soon walking along the main street, which was as sleepy and deserted as usual. Even at the tavern door not a soul was to be seen; but the landlord's face looked out from behind the window pane with a grim nod of greeting. A few houses beyond the inn, Sutherland paused close to a small one-storied cottage, in front of which

was a tiny garden, laid out in pansy beds.

'Will you come in, Marjorie?' he asked doubtfully.

Marjorie nodded and smiled, and without another word he opened the garden gate, crossed the walk, and led the way into the interior of the cottage.

CHAPTER VI.

THE WEAVER'S COTTAGE.

As they entered the door a loud humming sound came upon their ears, mingled with the sound of voices. Turning to the right, they found themselves on the threshold of a room, half parlour, half kitchen, at one end of which was a large loom, where an elderly man, of grave and somewhat careworn aspect, was busily weaving. Seated on a chair close to him was a girl of about fourteen, dressed in the ordinary petticoat and short gown, and reading aloud from a book.

At the other end of the room, where there was an open ingle and a fire, an elderly matron was cooking.

Suddenly there was an exclamation from the latter, who was the first to perceive the entrance of the newcomers.

'Johnnie!' she cried, holding out her arms; and in another moment she had folded her son in her embrace, and was kissing him fondly.

The young girl rose smiling, book in hand; the man ceased his weaving, but remained quite still in his chair.

'Yes, here I am, mother; and I've brought company, as you see!'

'Hoo's a' wi' ye, Marjorie?' cried the matron, holding out her hand. 'It's a treat to see your bonnie face. Sit ye down by the fire!'

'Is that my son?' said the weaver, in a deep musical voice, but without turning his head. His infirmity was now apparent—he was stone blind.

John Sutherland walked across the room, gave his sister a passing kiss, and placed his hand affectionately on the old man's shoulder.

'It's yoursel', my lad! I ken you noo. I feel your breath about me! What way did ye no write to tell us you were on the road hame?'

'I was not sure until the last moment that I could start so soon, but I jumped into the train last night, and down I came.'

'Who's alang wi' you?' asked the weaver, smiling. 'I'll wager it's Marjorie Annan!'

'Yes, Mr. Sutherland,' answered Marjorie, crossing the room and joining the

little group. 'I met Johnnie in Dumfries, and we came home together.'

The weaver nodded his head gently, and the smile on his face lightened into loving sweetness.

'Stand close side by side,' he said, 'while I tak' a long look at baith o' ye.'

'While you look at us!' echoed Marjorie, in surprise.

'Aye, and what for no? Dinna think, because my bodily e'en are blind, that I canna see weel wi' the e'en o' my soul! Aye, there you stand, lass and lad—my boy John, and Marjorie Annan; baith fair, baith wi' blue e'en; John prood and glad, and Marjorie blushing by his side; and I see what you canna see—a light all roond and abune ye, coming oot o' the golden gates o' Heaven! Stand still a wee and hark! Do

ye hear naething? Aye, but *I* can hear! A sound like kirkbells ringing far awa'.'

"As he spoke he sat with shining face, as if he indeed gazed on the sweet vision he was describing. Marjorie grew red as fire, and cast down her eyes; for she was only too conscious of the old man's meaning, and, remembering what had taken place that day, she felt constrained and almost annoyed. John Sutherland shared her uneasiness, and to divert the conversation into another channel, he spoke to his young sister, who stood smiling close by.

'What's the book in your hand, Jessie? You were reading out loud to my father when we came in.'

Jessie was about to reply, when the old man answered for her:

'It's jest Jamie Hogg's poems, John,' he

75605

said. 'She was reading me yon bonnie ballant aboot Kilmeny:

'"Bonnie Kilmeny went up the glen,
But it wasna to meet Duneira's men,
Nor the rosy monk o' the isle to see—
For Kilmeny was pure as pure could be."

Pure and fair like Marjorie Annan. Marjorie, my bairn, I whiles think you maun hae talk'd wi' the fairy folk yoursel', for when ye speak, it's like a sweet, sweet soond frae the spirit warl.'

'Lord forfen, gudeman!' broke in Mrs. Sutherland superstitiously.

But Marjorie, uneasy lest the old man's dreamy talk should again take an awkward turn, was determined to make her escape.

'Good-bye now, Mr. Sutherland,' she said, taking his hand in hers, 'I must

run home; Mr. Lorraine will be expecting me.'

And before anyone could say a word to detain her, she was crossing the threshold of the cottage. Young Sutherland followed her as far as the garden gate.

'Marjorie,' he said, 'I hope you're not angry?'

'No, no,' she replied; 'but I wish your father would not talk as if we were courting, Johnnie. It makes me feel so awkward, and you know it is not true.'

'Old folk will talk,' said John Sutherland, 'and father only speaks out of the fulness of his heart. He is very fond of you, Marjorie!'

'I know that, and I of him—that is why it troubles me to hear him talk like that.'

There was a moment's pause; then Sutherland sadly held out his hand.

'Well, good-bye just now! I'll be looking ye up at the manse!'

'Good-bye!' she answered. 'Come soon! Mr. Lorraine will be so glad to see you.'

So she hastened away, while Sutherland, with a sigh, stood looking after her. He had loved her so long and so silently, and now for the first time in his life he began to dread that she might not love him in return. To him, just then, it seemed as if all the world was darkened, the blue sky clouded, all the sweet spring weather touched with a wintry sense of fear.

Their friendship had begun curiously enough.

Sutherland's father, though only a poor

afflicted man, had thoughts far above his station, was self-educated, and well read in the literature of his country. He had composed, in the Scottish Doric, poems which were noticeable for plaintive beauty and delicacy of epithet, and when a young man he had published a volume 'by subscription.' Articles had appeared in the leading journals highly eulogizing both his talents and his character, and in thousands of Lowland homes the name of 'James Sutherland, the blind weaver poet,' was a household word.

So he was a proud man, and had taken great pains with the education of his children, especially that of his favourite son. As a boy, John Sutherland was always better dressed than boys of his own station, who went barefoot and compara-

tively neglected, and went to the best schools available; and at a very early age he had attracted the attention of the worthy minister of the parish. He had thus become acquainted with Mr. Lorraine's adopted daughter, who was brought up almost as a little lady, and speedily became attached to the weaver's quiet, bashful, gentle son, so different in his manners to the other children of the village.

The friendship, begun in infancy, had lasted through early youth, until Marjorie almost regarded John Sutherland, to use her own expression, as a 'brother,' and when the day came for the youth's departure to Glasgow University, where he was to complete his education, they had not separated without tears.

Very early Sutherland had exhibited a

natural talent for drawing and painting, and during the three or four years he had spent in Glasgow he attended the art classes and cultivated his gift to the utmost. He drew well, and had a fine eye for colour, and it was the ambition of his life to become a painter by profession. Nowhere, perhaps, save in Scotland, would it have been possible for a young man with such small means at his command to cultivate his natural talents so thoroughly; but he was patient, diligent, and self-sacrificing, and had worked wonders out of his scanty opportunites—so that, from being a comparatively friendless lad, he had risen high in the world's esteem, and had awakened the sympathy of many persons powerful in the domain of Art.

He stood at the gate watching till Mar-

jorie disappeared; then, with another heavy sigh, he turned back into the cottage.

Meantime, Marjorie Annan hastened homewards, not a little troubled by the event of the morning. Fond as she was of her old playmate, she could not acknowledge to herself that his abrupt confession of love had awakened any response in her heart. On the contrary, it had startled and frightened her to a degree she could not have conceived possible. If, like other growing maids, she had sometimes dreamed of a lover, her ideal had certainly never taken the shape of poor John Sutherland. She looked upon him as a sort of humble friend, even a brother, but that was all. Though several years her senior, he seemed to her only a boy, and the idea of being courted by *him*, of all people in the world, was absurd.

Yet, child as she was, she had woman's wit enough to perceive that the young man was terribly in earnest, that the situation was a delicate one, and that for the future the relations between them would have to be more or less altered. John Sutherland, avowedly her lover, with the full sanction and earnest hope of his father and mother, was a different person from her old friend Johnnie, with whom she had no reserves, and whom she had all along regarded with the frank indifference of sisterly affection.

Leaving the village behind her, she soon came in sight of the old church, and there, leaning over the church gate, was Solomon Mucklebackit, with hair white as snow, and a figure bent nearly double with old age. But, old as he was, and grim as ever, his face

brightened at Marjorie's coming, and his wrinkled cheeks were puckered up into the ghost of a smile.

'Here I am at last,' said Marjorie, nodding affectionately to him.

The ruling passion was still strong in Solomon, and he began to grumble.

'An hour late,' he muttered; 'what kept ye, Marjorie? The meenister thought ye had missit the waggonette.'

'I had a call to make in the village, Solomon.'

'Weel, hurry in and get your tea before it's cauld,' returned Solomon; 'he's waiting on ye.' Then, as she turned away, he demanded querulously, 'Ye were to bring doon five pounds o' black tea and a bottle o' sherry wine frae Cumstie the grocer's. Hae ye gotten them?'

Marjorie shook her head.

'I forgot them in my hurry to get away. I'm so sorry! But I'll write to-night, and they'll come over by the carrier to-morrow.'

Solomon grunted gloomily, while the girl crossed the road, opened the manse gate, and hastened to the house. She found the front door ajar, and, crossing the lobby, entered the very sitting-room whither she had been carried in the minister's arms seventeen years before. After all these years, the little parlour remained just the same, with scarcely an article of furniture added; and there, in the armchair by the fire, was the minister, just the same, but older, weaker, and wearier. He looked up as she entered, and his mild blue eye grew soft with loving recognition.

CHAPTER VII.

AT THE MANSE.

Mr. Lorraine was now long past the great climacteric, and breaking fast; indeed, so infirm had he become that he had more than once thought of retiring from the ministry altogether. Though his body was frail, however, his intellect was as bright as ever, and when Marjorie entered the study he was busily engaged in reading one of his favourite books.

He looked up with his kindly smile as his foster-daughter appeared.

'Is it you, my bairn?' he said, as he came over and kissed her. 'Welcome home again! Though you have been scarcely a week away, I have missed you sorely, and have been counting the days till your return.'

For some months past, I should now explain, Marjorie had been accustomed to stay at a ladies' school in the neighbouring town from Monday till Friday of every week, returning each Friday afternoon, and remaining till the following Monday. This arrangement had been found necessary, as it was impossible for the girl to complete her simple education at home, and as the distance was too great for her to go to and fro daily without inconvenience.

'And what news have you got from the town?' continued the minister, as Marjorie,

holding his hand in hers, sank into a chair at his side. 'How is Miss Carruthers? and how do you get along with your studies?'

'Miss Carruthers sends her compliments, and as she is called away to Edinburgh to see her sick sister, I am to bide at home for a week. A whole week, Mr. Lorraine! and in May-time! Oh, I am so glad!'

'So am I, my bairn,' said the minister. 'A week's rest will do you good, and it will do *me* good too, I hope, for I have been far from well since you went away. I had one of my old attacks on Tuesday, and have been obliged to keep the house.'

'You will be better now,' said Marjorie fondly. 'I will nurse you!'

'Aye, aye; and the sight of your face and the sound of your voice will do me

more good than the doctor. By the way, my bairn, I had one here to-day inquiring after you, and she will be here again this evening.'

'I know! Miss Hetherington, of the Castle?'

'Yes, Miss Hetherington. It is strange, my bairn, how much interest the good lady takes in you—she who cares so little for any other living thing; and yet after all it is *not* strange, for my Marjorie is a favourite with high and low.'

The girl's face grew troubled as she answered:

'I hope, Mr. Lorraine, she won't be asking me up to the Castle; I feel so lonely there, and she—she frightens me sometimes! She has such strange ways, and the house is an awful place.'

'Well, well, you must be careful not to offend her, for she is a true friend.'

'I know she is very rich, and good too, but for all that I cannot bear to be alone in her company. I wonder why she likes to have me! She sits in her armchair looking at me for hours together, till sometimes I feel as if I could scream out and run away!'

'She is a strange woman,' said the minister thoughtfully; 'but you have no reason to fear her. She takes a great interest in you, and in all that concerns you.'

'I know that, but——'

'Her eccentricities are only put on, I think, to conceal a heart that is truly kindly. You must try to humour her, my bairn, remembering how much she has

done for you, and may yet do. Not that I would have you shape your conduct towards her by any sordid hope of future gain; no, no, that would be unworthy; but it is well, after all, to have so powerful a friend, should anything happen to me.'

'Oh, don't speak like that!' exclaimed Marjorie, her eyes filling with tender tears. 'I cannot bear it.'

'I am an old man, Marjorie, and in the natural course of things must very soon be called to my account. Seventy and seventeen cannot walk together long! My pilgrimage is nearly at an end, your road lies long and bright before you. But there, we will not speak of that, for, indeed, I am not repining at my lot. These seventeen years, my bairn, you have been light and sunshine to our old

dwelling. When you came, though I was an old man then, my heart leapt up again, and I seemed to take another lease of life; and when I go, I shall go in peace, remembering how good the Lord has been to me, who, but for your coming, might have died a lonely man.'

He ceased in some consternation, for Marjorie was sobbing, with the tears streaming down her cheeks, and at that moment Solomon Mucklebackit entered the room, hat in hand.

'What's wrong noo?' cried the sexton, looking sharply at the pair.

'Nothing, Solomon, my man,' said the minister mildly, 'only——'

'Dinna be flyting at the bairn, or preaching till her. I wonder at ye, meenister. Is it because she forgot to

bring the message frae Cumstie the grocer?'

Mr. Lorraine burst out laughing; and then exclaimed, patting Marjorie affectionately on the head:

'You see, Marjorie, Solomon is as ready to take your part as ever, and even ere he kens your fault! He thinks I have been scolding you.'

Solomon gave a grunt.

'I think the bairn's wanting her tea, if you wish *my* opinion. Will I bring it in?'

'Aye; unless Mysie is there——'

'Mysie's up the toon,' replied the sexton, 'but the pot's infusing at the kitchen fire, and I'll fetch it in mysel'.'

So saying, he left the room, and soon returned carrying the tray, with teapot, cups, and saucers, and a loaf of bread

and butter. He set them down on the table, and then, as he passed Marjorie's chair, patted her on the shoulder.

'Dinna heed the meenister!' he whispered. 'He's auld, and getting grumpy!'

At this remark, which was perfectly audible, and indeed was intended to be, Mr. Lorraine laughed cheerfully again, and Marjorie, drying her eyes, caught the contagion of his merriment.

'Mr. Lorraine was *not* scolding me, Solomon!' she cried.

But Solomon, who was never to be conciliated by anything but sheer opposition, puckered up his face into a comical frown.

'Atweel, if he was, I warrant ye desairved it,' he said shortly. 'What way did ye forget the tea frae Cumstie's?'

And with another grunt he walked

from the room, having managed somehow, 'by his grim interference and oddity of demeanour, to dispel the temporary cloud of sad foreboding. Marjorie took off her hat and shawl, and, sitting at the table, began to pour out the tea, while Mr. Lorraine, forgetting his recent train of thought, questioned her anew about her doings in the town. Thus far they chatted cheerfully together, and shared the simple meal.

'And how about the French, Marjorie?' asked Mr. Lorraine presently. 'Are you coming on?'

'Very slowly,' was her reply. 'I find it hard to pronounce, and the verbs are a dreadful trouble—and the genders. It's so hard to tell whether a thing is masculine or feminine, and I wonder how the

French folk themselves can tell. I'm afraid I'll never learn the French rightly.'

'I never could master it myself, though after all, maybe, I never fairly tried; it's a queer kind of tongue, like the chirping of birds, I'm thinking. What like is your teacher?'

'Monsieur Caussidière! A handsome gentleman, with black hair and black eyes.'

'A young man, Marjorie?'

'Not old; but very grave and sad, as if he had had much trouble; and I think he has, for he is an exile, and cannot return to his native land.'

Her eyes were full of dreamy sympathy and pity, and as she spoke she seemed to summon up before her the Frenchman's thoughtful face. Mr. Lorraine

glanced at her sideways, with a certain gentle suspicion.

'Has he any other scholars?' he asked quietly.

'Only myself out of our school. I go to his house for my lesson every forenoon. And he is very, very kind! He would scarcely take the fees. He said——'

But here Marjorie paused and blushed, for she suddenly remembered Caussidière's words and ardent looks of admiration.

'Well, what did he say?'

'He said he was ashamed to take money for teaching, and then—then he talked about France, and how he longed to return, and how sad it was to be an exile. That was all!'

Mr. Lorraine did not question any further, but seemed plunged in thought.

He did not quite like the idea of this handsome Frenchman; indeed, he was old-fashioned and simple enough to have a low opinion of the morals of the whole French nation! But he kept his suspicions to himself, and quietly determined to make inquiries.

'By the way, Marjorie,' he said after a pause, 'you know that your school fees are paid by Miss Hetherington?'

Marjorie nodded.

'It was *her* wish that you should be taught the French. For my own part, I never thought much of either the language or the people, but that may be my prejudice. Miss Hetherington thinks that every young lady should learn French. Curious, the interest she takes in you!'

There was a noise at the front door, a sound of feet in the lobby.

Solomon entered abruptly.

'She's ootside,' he said. 'Will I bring her ben?'

'Who is outside, Solomon, my man?'

'Wha but Mistress Hetherington, frae the Castle. The carriage is at the door, and she's wrangling wi' the driver.'

Mr. Lorraine rose feebly from his chair, while Marjorie nervously put down her cup and saucer and prepared to receive the visitor.

'This way, mem!' said Solomon; and immediately there entered the room a woman of middle height, with snow-white hair, leaning upon a staff or hand-crutch.

She had black piercing eyes, a com-

plexion like alabaster, and her front teeth projected slightly over her under lip. Though she had the air of an old woman, and walked with a stoop, her face had scarcely a wrinkle, and her voice was deep and powerful.

Marjorie sprang up and stood trembling. Without a word, Miss Hetherington crossed the room and looked fixedly in the young girl's face.

'Weel, Marjorie Annan?' she said, in a strong Scotch accent.

'How—how do you do, Miss Hetherington?'

'As you see—weel enough not to complain. Stand still, and let me look at ye! There, you may kiss me if you like!'

Marjorie did not like, but she bent forward and touched the lady's frosty cheek.

'Did ye come doon in the waggonette? Nae need to answer, for I ken, and I ken who came along wi' ye! What's this between you and Johnnie Sutherland?'

Had a bomb exploded under her feet, Marjorie could not have shown more consternation. She stammered and blushed, and cast an appealing look at Mr. Lorraine.

'How's this, Marjorie!' he said gently. 'You did not tell me that Johnnie had come back.'

'I'll swear she didna,' exclaimed Miss Hetherington, with a low harsh laugh. 'See hoo she blushes! The lad and she had a tryste in Dumfries, and came down together.'

Here Solomon, who stood at the room door looking on, thought it his duty to interfere.

'And what then? What if Johnnie Sutherland did convoy oor Marjorie hame? There's nae hairm in that, I'm thinking.'

'Hold *your* tongue, Solomon Muckle-backit,' said Miss Hetherington, with a sharp rap of her crutch upon the ground. 'Mind your own business!'

'It is my business,' retorted Solomon doggedly. 'Marjorie, dinna heed her!'

'Solomon!' cried Mr. Lorraine, with a certain authority.

'Weel?'

'Be good enough to leave the room.'

The old man uttered a low snort of defiance, but immediately obeyed. Miss Hethering-ton took a chair close to the fireplace and sat in it, leaning heavily on her crutch.

'Nae fool like an old fool!' she muttered, looking at Mr. Lorraine, but referring to

the refractory sexton. 'Between the twa o' ye, you're spoiling Marjorie Annan altogether.'

'I hope not,' returned the minister mildly, resuming his own seat. 'After all, too, Solomon is quite right. Johnnie and Marjorie are old friends.'

'All the parish kens *that*,' said the lady of the Castle. 'Come here, Marjorie, and dinna be feared—I'll no *eat* you! Look me in the face! Are you and Johnnie courting?'

Marjorie's face was scarlet, and she trembled violently.

'Oh, Miss Hetherington,' she cried, 'what do you mean?'

And she held out her hands to Mr. Lorraine, as if beseeching him to take her part.

'Really, Miss Hetherington,' he said, 'Marjorie is a child, and I am sure such nonsense as you speak of has never entered her head.'

'Nonsense, is it?' retorted the lady, with the same low, harsh laugh as before. 'Weel, it's the nonsense to which a' folk come early or late, gentle and simple, and trust me to ken better than either you or that idiot Solomon what young lasses are made o'. Do you think Marjorie Annan's made of stane or airn, and doesna ken a fair-favoured lad from a rowan tree or a milk coo?'

'I think she is too young for love-making,' returned the minister.

'Then you think wrang; it's never o'er early for a lassie to begin. As for Johnnie, I'll no say but what he's a decent lad and

a modest, and he has talent as weel, the rogue, heaps o' talent, though he's only a weaver's son—eh, Marjorie, has he no ?'

And as she looked at Marjorie there was no anger in her stern black eyes, rather a sort of grim-humoured sympathy. Seeing his foster-child's confusion, Mr. Lorraine attempted to give the conversation another turn.

'If young Sutherland has developed natural gifts, he has you to thank for the opportunity. We all know how kind you have been to him.'

'Because I bought two o' his pictures,' she retorted, with her characteristic and disagreeable laugh. 'I gave him fifty pound a-piece for them, the more fool I. One was a view o' the Castle frae the south, wi' a cuddie eating thistles in the

foreground—a cuddie as big as a hippopotamus; the other was Marjorie hersel' wi' her lap full o' wild flowers, sitting by the side o' Annan water, and about as like *her*, by that token, as it was like Solomon Mucklebackit.'

'We always considered it an excellent likeness,' said Mr. Lorraine good-humouredly.

'So it was,' cried Marjorie impulsively; 'everybody said so.'

'And what everybody said must be true?' demanded the lady, with a sneer. 'Weel, likeness or no likeness, the lad has talent, as I said; and if he works hard, maybe he'll be able, some fine day, to paint a picture. So much for Johnnie Sutherland. Now we'll come to the business which brought me doon. I want Marjorie to come to me to-morrow and spend the day.'

The very proposal which Marjorie had dreaded! She opened her lips to give a trembling refusal, to frame some awkward excuse, but before she could say a word, Miss Hetherington continued with decision:

'I'll be expecting her early, say at ten. She can walk the distance, unless she's o'er idle; in that case, I'll send the carriage to fetch her.'

'I am very sorry,' stammered Marjorie, 'but to-morrow——'

She paused, and glanced in supplication at her foster-father.

'The fact is,' said Mr. Lorraine, 'we had made other arrangements for to-morrow. Some other day, maybe.'

Miss Hetherington's eyes flashed, and her crutch was sharply struck upon the floor.

'To-morrow and no other day will suit *me*. I hae something to say to her that willna keep. Do you hear that, Marjorie?'

'Yes,' answered Marjorie timidly, 'but I have only just come home, and I would rather——'

Here Miss Hetherington rose abruptly from her chair.

'Come or stay!' she exclaimed. 'Please yoursel', Marjorie Annan; but if you stay at home the morn, you'll wait lang for another invitation.'

Eager not to give offence, Mr. Lorraine now interposed.

'If you wish it, Marjorie shall come.'

'Very well,' said Miss Hetherington sharply; then, turning to the girl, she added, 'Will you walk, or shall I send the carriage?'

'I—I—will walk,' returned Marjorie timidly, with the air of one doomed to condign punishment.

'Then I'll expect you at ten, and nae later. Now, gie me your arm to the carriage.'

Marjorie obeyed, and with a short 'Good day' to the minister, Miss Hetherington left the room. By this time it had grown almost dark, and Solomon was waiting in the lobby with the church lanthorn.

'Will I show you a light, mem?' he asked, respectfully enough.

'No, I can see weel enough,' was the reply; and still leaning on Marjorie's arm, the lady passed out of the hall door, crossed the garden, and found her carriage, an old-fashioned one-horse brougham, waiting at the outer gate. Assisted by Marjorie, she stepped in, and Marjorie drew back.

'Marjorie!'

'Yes, Miss Hetherington.'

'Kiss me again, my bairn.'

Was it Marjorie's fancy, or was the voice that spoke quite different from the harsh voice that had so troubled her in the room? She bent down her face, and the lady's two hands were uplifted to draw it softly down for the farewell kiss. The lips that kissed her on cheek and forehead were cold as ice. It was no fancy, however, that the same gentle voice that she had just heard—so softened, so changed!—spoke again, and in these words:

'God bless you, Marjorie Annan!'

Then, while Marjorie stood trembling and wondering, the lady of the Castle was driven rapidly away.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CASTLE AND ITS MISTRESS.

Miss Margaret Hetherington of Hetherington Castle was a spinster lady of great wealth, who inherited in her own right the estates that had once belonged to her father, and afterwards, for a short term, to a brother who died childless, leaving her the next of kin. For fifteen or sixteen years at least she had remained in solitary possession of the place, and during that time she had scarcely left the neighbourhood, save for a few weeks each winter, when

she went to occupy a house—her town house, as she called it—in the city of Edinburgh.

When local gossip first began to speak of the foundling who had been left on the manse doorstep, and who had been taken in so tenderly by the minister, Miss Hetherington was living at the Castle with her brother; and being a lady of somewhat stern virtue, she heard the news with a certain amount of moral indignation. A few Sundays afterwards she appeared at church, and after service questioned Mr. Lorraine, who told her all the circumstances, which interested her so much that she at once went to the manse and saw the child. On learning the minister's determination to rear the infant as his own, she at first inveighed bitterly against the wicked mother

who had lain so heavy a burthen on the good man's slender means, and then, after a pitying look at little Marjorie, presented the minister with a fifty-pound note.

'Dinna tell my brother I gave it to you,' she said; 'he would think me a fool for my pains, and maybe I am.'

The minister promised to keep her charity private, and from that day forth Miss Hetherington continued to take a friendly interest in the little castaway. Two years later her brother died, and she reigned supreme and solitary at the Castle. As time advanced she grew more and more eccentric, more and more of a recluse; but her interest in Marjorie did not cease, and she continued to assist the minister in his responsibility. Now and then, at long intervals, Marjorie was sent for to the

Castle to spend a day or two in the stern lady's company, and she never returned home without a handsome present. She never ceased, however, to regard her benefactress with a certain dread.

Thus the long years had passed away, and now Miss Hetherington, though in reality little over fifty years of age, looked quite an old woman. She seemed to have no kinsfolks and fewer friends, but dwelt alone up at the Castle in utter solitude.

Early in the morning after Miss Hetherington's visit, Marjorie prepared to set out for the Castle. She would gladly have made some excuse to stay at home, but Mr. Lorraine would not hear of it, and at his earnest request she consented.

'She is your best friend,' said the minister, 'and you must not offend her.'

'Very well, I will go,' answered Marjorie; 'but I shall come home early in the afternoon. She'll never ask me to stay all night? If she does, I can't do it!'

'Why not, Marjorie?'

'The Castle's eerie enough at daytime, but at night it's dreadful, and Miss Hetherington creeps about like a ghost. I'd sooner sleep out in the kirkyard!'

At a quarter before nine she started, for she had three miles to walk, and she wished to linger on the road, which lay through pleasant country pastures and among green lanes. The morning was bright and clear, though there were clouds to seaward which spoke of coming rain. Passing up through the village, the way she had come the previous day, she saw young Sutherland standing at the gate of the weaver's cottage.

'Good morning, Marjorie. Where are you going to so early?'

'Up to Miss Hetherington's at the Castle,' she replied.

'Are you going to walk?'

'Yes.'

'Then may I come with you a piece of the road?'

'Not to-day, Johnnie,' she said nervously. 'I'm late, and must hurry on.'

The young man sighed, but did not press his request. Troubled and vexed at the meeting, Marjorie walked quickly away.

She followed the townward highway till she came to the cross-roads where she had alighted from the waggonette. Close to the cross-road there was a stile leading to a foot-path across the fields.

Her foot was on the stile, and she was about to step over, when she heard a voice behind her. Turning quickly, she saw, to her astonishment, the French teacher from Dumfries.

He was clad in a dark walking suit, with broad-brimmed wide-awake hat, and was smoking a cigar. He looked at her smilingly, and raised his hat. She thought he had never looked so handsome, as he stood there in the sunshine, with his pale face smiling and his bright black eyes fixed eagerly upon her.

'Monsieur Caussidière!' she cried in astonishment.

'Yes, it is I!' he replied in his sad musical voice. 'I have walked from the town, and was going down to see you.'

'To see *me!*' she echoed.

'Yes, mademoiselle, and the good man your guardian. You have spoken of him so often that I longed to make his acquaintance, and having two idle days before me, I am here, as you behold.'

Marjorie did not know what to say or do; the encounter was so unexpected. She stood trembling and blushing in such obvious embarrassment that the Frenchman came to her relief.

'Do not let me detain you, if you have an appointment. Or stay! perhaps you will permit me to walk a little way in your company?'

And before she quite understood what was taking place, he had lightly leapt the stile, and was handing her over with great politeness. They strolled along the foot-path side by side.

Suddenly Marjorie paused.

'I am going up to the Castle,' she said, 'and I shall not be back till the afternoon. Do not let me take you out of your way.'

The Frenchman smiled and shrugged his shoulders.

'Oh! one way is to me as good as another,' he exclaimed.

'But you said you wished to see Mr. Lorraine.'

'Precisely; but I prefer your company, my child.'

'He is at home now, and will be so glad of some one to talk to.'

'I see you want to get rid of me, little one,' said Caussidière paternally. 'If I go, will you promise to return soon? Remember, I shall not depart until you do return.'

'Yes, I will promise,' answered Marjorie. 'I—I would rather you did not come any further.'

'And wherefore, my child? Is my company so disagreeable?'

'No, monsieur; but the folk in this place are aye talking, and if they saw me walking with a strange gentleman it would be all over the parish before night, and then Miss Hetherington would hear of it, and I should get no peace.'

And as she spoke she looked round nervously, as if dreading an eye-witness.

'Miss Hetherington! Pray, who is she?'

'The lady I am going to see. She has eyes everywhere—nothing happens but she kens.'

'But surely there is nothing to conceal,'

persisted the Frenchman. 'It is very natural that, having met you, I should offer to escort you.'

'In France, maybe, but not here in Annandale. Down here, monsieur, when two folk are seen out walking in the fields together, all the world believes them to be *courting*.'

She had spoken without reflection, and her face now grew crimson as she met her companion's quiet eyes and realized the significance of her own words.

'I see,' cried the Frenchman, laughing. 'They would take me for your lover.'

Marjorie did not reply, but turned her face away and began to walk on rapidly. But the Frenchman kept at her side.

'Ah, my child,' he continued, 'I am more fit to be your father than your lover.

I am not so frivolous and vain as to presume to think of one so young and pretty. You must not mind me! I am your teacher, your friend—that is all!'

She was touched by the tone in which he spoke, but after a moment's hesitation she paused again, and looked him full in the face.

'What you say is quite true, monsieur,' she said; 'but, oh! do not follow me any further. See! that is the Castle, and who knows but Miss Hetherington herself is watching us from the tower?'

She pointed across the fields towards a dark belt of woodland, over which two old-fashioned towers were indeed visible, about a mile and a half away.

'Well, I will do as you desire, my child,' answered Caussidière, after a moment's

hesitation; 'I will go and make the acquaintance of your guardian. *Au revoir!*'

'*Au revoir, monsieur!*'

He took her hand, lifted it to his lips, and kissed it; then, with an air of respectful gallantry, he swept off his hat and bowed. She could not help smiling; he looked so fantastic to her simple sight, and yet so handsome!

She walked on thoughtfully. At the next stile she turned and looked back. He was still stationary in the pathway, gazing after her; but the moment she looked back he kissed his hand.

Marjorie turned again and walked on, with no little fluttering of the heart; the moment she was quite out of sight she slackened her pace and began thinking.

The last twenty-four hours had been

full of surprises for the simple girl. She was beginning to realize, for the first time in her life, the curious sensation, confused yet delightful, of being loved and admired, and not by one man only, but by two ; for there could be no mistaking the French master's tender solicitation, though it had not been expressed in words.

Child as she was, Marjorie felt rather frightened. Young Sutherland's feelings towards her she could understand—he had known her so long, and they had always been such friends ; and though she could hardly look upon him in the light of a lover, yet his passionate outburst had not taken her altogether by surprise.

With Monsieur Caussidière it was different. He seemed so far away from her, so much her elder and superior. Doubtless,

had she been a romantic girl, given to dreaming or novel-reading, she would have been fascinated by his admiration; for he was very handsome, and interesting to boot. But she was not particularly romantic, and her feeling towards him was a peculiar mixture of awe, terror, and amusement. She was afraid of him, firstly, because he was a foreigner, and secondly, because he was so clever; amused by him, because he was so entirely different, both in character and manners, from all the men she had ever met. It seemed absurd to think that he could seriously care for a child, a school-girl, like herself.

Troubled and perplexed, she crossed the fields, and reaching a lonely road, came into the dark shadow of the woods which surrounded Hetherington Castle. Following

the road for about a hundred yards, she reached a dilapidated and uninhabited lodge, standing at the end of a grass-grown avenue. Pushing open a rusty iron gate, she entered the avenue and wandered on, with gloomy woods on either side. Deep sylvan silence surrounded her, broken only by the twittering of small birds and the occasional coo of a stock-dove. From time to time a wood-pigeon crossed the blue open space above her head, and conies, like elfin things, gamboled in the grass before her, saw her coming, and vanished away. Wild-flowers of the spring-time, speedwells and primroses, grew thick on the sides of the avenue, and everywhere, save where old ruts showed where vehicles once had passed, there was a carpet of long grass and soft many-coloured moss.

At last, turning a corner and coming out into open sunshine, she saw the Castle standing in the midst of a broad piece of pasture where cows were grazing. It consisted of a two-storeyed building, attached to the two old ivied towers. The edifice itself, as well as the pasture in front of it and the walled garden behind it, looked forlorn and neglected. Rank grass and weeds grew almost to the very threshold, and the walls were disfigured with great mildew-like stains.

Approaching nearer, she came to another carriage road, which swept right up to the main entrance. She passed along the front of the house, and came to the hall door, which stood wide open. Close to her hand was a brass handle communicating with a rusty bell; she reached out her hand

and rang, and the bell sounded—a hollow, jangling, dismal sound.

She waited, no one came; then she rang again—more loudly.

In answer to the second peal, she heard shuffling footsteps along the lobby; then a hard-featured elderly man-servant, dressed in rusty black, appeared on the threshold, and gave her a nod of gloomy recognition.

'It's *you*, Miss Marjorie!' he said. 'What way did ye no come ben without ringing? *She's* waiting on ye!'

So saying, he led the way into the lobby, a dark and dreary passage hung with oil paintings and antique maps and prints; thence into a large apartment, divided by an open folding door into two portions. Old family portraits covered the walls, the suite was of old-fashioned oak and crimson velvet,

the oaken floor strewn with loose pieces of carpets, rugs, and skins of deer and foreign animals. On the tables were books—old keepsakes, county histories, albums of prints. There were heavy curtains to the windows, which looked out on the pasture land or paddock described above.

In the further room was a large mantelpiece of black marble, cracked across; on the mantelpiece an old-fashioned clock, with a bronze figure of Wallace in complete armour; and above this hung a dingy oil-painting of the last Master of Hetherington, booted and spurred, in his costume as leader of the Annandale Hunt. A faint fire burned in the grate, and lying before it, on a rug of black bearskin, was a deerhound, old and toothless.

As Marjorie entered, the dog rose snarling

and showing his toothless gums, but recognising her, he gave a faint wag of the tail and sank down again to doze.

'Bide here,' said the old servant. 'She's up in the tower. I'll tell her you're come.'

And he shuffled from the room. Left alone in the chamber, Marjorie looked around her nervously. The place was dark and cheerless enough to make a strange frame for her young and glowing beauty. The faces on the walls looked down on her gloomily, that of the late master wearing a particularly forbidding expression. It was that of a man in the prime of life, with dark, piercing eyes like his sister's, a coarse, fierce mouth, and straight black hair. The original, when living, had been notorious for his life of reckless dissipation, which had laid him

low when he had only just attained his fortieth year.

Presently the room door opened, and the mistress of the house appeared.

She was dressed in an old-fashioned robe of stiff black silk, and wore a cap, like that of a widow, over her snow-white hair. She came in leaning on her crutch, and nodded grimly to her guest.

'Sit ye doon,' she said, pointing to a seat, and herself dropping into an armchair before the fire. Then, drawing out a man's gold hunting-watch and opening it, she continued, 'Twenty-five minutes after ten. You're late in coming, Marjorie Annan. I doubt you were lingering on the way.'

CHAPTER IX.

THE BAR SINISTER.

As she spoke, and closed her watch sharply, Miss Hetherington fixed her black eyes keenly on Marjorie, who, remembering her recent encounter with Caussidière, flushed red and trembled. A curious smile grew upon the stern woman's bloodless face as she continued :

'Aye, aye, you were lingering, and maybe you had pleasant company. Who was yon you parted with out there among the green fields ?'

Marjorie started in consternation. Her fears, then, were right, and it was useless to conceal anything from Miss Hetherington, who was like a witch, and had eyes and ears everywhere.

'Oh, Miss Hetherington,' she exclaimed, 'did you see us together?'

'I was up on the tower wi' my spying-glass, and I saw far awa' a lassie that looked like Marjorie Annan, and a lad I took at first for Johnnie Sutherland, till he began booing and kissing his hand, and then I saw it couldna be Johnnie.'

Marjorie now perceived that all concealment was useless, and at once told her hostess of the meeting with her French teacher. She did not think it expedient, however, to describe with exactness the Frenchman's conversation; but even as it

was, Miss Hetherington's brow darkened, and her eyes flashed with a light like that of anger.

'Braw doings!' she muttered. 'Braw doings for a young growing lassie o' seventeen! Your French teacher, say you? What's his name, Marjorie?'

'Monsieur Caussidière.'

'And what's the man doing down here instead of teaching his classes in the town?'

'Indeed, I can't tell,' returned Marjorie. 'I met him quite by accident on my way to see *you*.'

'Humph! What like is he? Is he young?'

'Not very young.'

'Weel favoured?'

'Yes; and very clever.'

'Worse and worse,' said Miss Hetherington. 'Now, Marjorie, listen to me!'

'Yes, Miss Hetherington.'

'Look me in the face while you answer. Do you think this French scoundrel—he is a scoundrel, tak' it for granted—has come down here in pursuit o' his pupil? Dinna be feared to answer. Is he fond o' you, Marjorie?'

'I—I think he likes me.'

'Has he said as muckle?'

'Yes, Miss Hetherington,' answered Marjorie, who was incapable of a falsehood.

'And *you?* What think ye of him?'

'I like him very much, Miss Hetherington. He has been very kind and patient with me.'

'But do you *love* him?—tell me that; or

is it Johnnie Sutherland that has won your silly heart? Out with it, Marjorie Annan. Frank confession's good for the soul, and I'm your friend.'

Marjorie blushed, but kept her frank blue eyes fixed on her questioner's face.

'I don't love anybody, Miss Hetherington —not in the way you mean.'

'Are you sure o' that?'

'Quite sure.'

'Then you're a wise lassie,' cried the lady, rising to her feet. 'Men are kittle cattle, and safer at a distance. Look at that picture,' she continued, suddenly pointing to the portrait over the mantelpiece. 'You ken who it is?'

'Yes; your brother, Mr. Hugh.'

'Hugh Hetherington, God rest his soul! and the best brother woman ever had.

Folk thought that he was bad, and he had my father's temper; but he guarded his sister like a watch-dog; and I wish *you* had a brother to guard you half as weel. Look underneath my een, on my right cheek! You see that mark? I shall carry it to my grave. 'Hugh gave it to me when I was a young lass. He struck me in the face wi' his fist, because he thought I was hiding something from him, and coorting wi' one I needna name.'

The lady's face grew full of a wild, fierce light as she spoke, and she laughed strangely to herself. Marjorie gazed at her in dread.

'It was a lie, but Hugh was right; he loved his sister. He kenned what men were, he knew their black hearts. They're a' bad, or mostly a'. Tak' warning, Mar-

jorie Annan, and hearken to me!. Let nae man come to you in secret wi' words o' love; hide naething from them that care for you—from Mr. Lorraine or from me. Trust the auld heads, Marjorie; they ken what is right. God has made you bonnie; may He keep you pure and happy till the end!'

Her tone was changed to one of deep earnestness, even of pathos. She walked up and down the room in agitation, pausing now and again, and leaning upon her crutch.

'No that I would hae you lead a lonely life!' she exclaimed after a pause. 'Look at me! I'm no that old in years, but I'm grey, grey wi' loneliness and trouble. I might hae had one to care for me; I might hae had bairns; but it wasna to be. I'm a

rich woman, but I hae neither kith nor kin. Lord forbid you should ever be the same! But when you marry—and marry you will some day—you must choose a true man—aye, true and honest, whether he be rich or poor; and if you canna choose, let the auld folk that care for you, and that ken the world, choose for you. Trust their een, no your ain! Never deceive them; keep nae secrets from them. Mind that, Marjorie Annan!'

She ceased her tirade, and stood gazing keenly at Marjorie, who sat still, listening in wonder. Despite her sharp tone and brusque manner, there was a tenderness in her tone that could not be mistaken. Then, all at once, with the abruptness peculiar to her, she changed her tone again, and broke into a low, chuckling laugh.

'And now I hae preach'd my sermon,' she said, with her grim smile, 'hae you had breakfast? Will you tak' some tea?'

But Marjorie had breakfasted before starting, and wanted nothing.

'Very weel. Come and walk in the garden.'

She led the way from the room, and Marjorie quietly followed.

Passing out by the rear of the house across a lonely courtyard, they reached a door in the high wall, and entered the garden—a wilderness of fruit-trees, shrubs, and currant-bushes, sadly in need of the gardener's hand. Tangled creepers and weeds grew over the grassy paths. Here and there were seats, and in one corner was an arbour almost buried in umbrage. It was a desolate, neglected place, but the sun

was shining, and the air was bright and warm.

Miss Hetherington took her companion's arm and walked slowly from path to path.

'The garden's like its' mistress,' she said presently, 'lonesome and neglectit. Since Wattie Henderson died, I hae never employed a regular gardener. But it's bonnie in summer time, for a' that, and I like it, wild as it is. I should like weel to be buried here, right in the heart o' the auld place!'

She entered the neglected arbour and sat down wearily. Marjorie stood looking at her in timid sympathy, while she pursued the dreary current of her thought.

'Folk say I'm mean, and maybe I am; but it's no that! I'm the last o' the

Hetheringtons, and it's right and fitting that the place should waste awa' like mysel'. But I mind the time weel—it's no sae lang syne—when it was gladsome and merry. Everything was in grand order then, and my father kept open house to the gentry. Now a's changed! Whiles I wonder what will become o' the auld house when I'm ta'en. Strangers will come, maybe, and turn it upside doon. What would *you* dae, Marjorie Annan, if you were a rich leddy and mistress o' a place like this?'

The question came so abruptly at the end of the long string of lamentations, that Marjorie scarcely knew what to reply. She smiled awkwardly, and repeated the question.

'What would I *do*, Miss Hetherington?'

'Aye. Come!'

'I cannot tell, but I don't think I could thole to live here all alone.'

'Aye, indeed? Would you *sell* the Castle, and pooch the siller?'

'No, Miss Hetherington. I should like to keep what my forebears had owned.'

The lady nodded her head approvingly.

'The lassie has sense after a'!' she exclaimed. 'Aye, aye, Marjorie, you're right! It's something to belang to the line o' the Hetheringtons, and the auld lairds o' the Moss would rise in their graves if they kenned that strangers were dwelling on the land. Did I ever tell ye how our line began, Marjorie?'

'No, Miss Hetherington.'

'Weel, I'll tell you now. Sometimes I smile to mysel' to think it o'er; for, proud as our folk hae been, we began wi' a bar sinister. Ken you what that is, Marjorie? Weel, it's *this*. Our ancestor, Hugh Hetherington, was a bastard son o' Mary Montgomery, one o' Queen Mary's women, and folk said (I'm thinking it was true!) the great Earl o' Bothwell was his father! That was the way we began,' she continued, with her dry sarcastic laugh; 'and what then? Folk thought little o' a bar sinister in those days; and if you were to trace back half the proud families o' Scotland to their beginnings, you'd find that few or none began wi' the Kirk's blessing and a wedding-ring!'

The theme was a curious one to pursue before so young a girl, but Miss Hether-

ington, for some reason or other, seemed to find peculiar interest in it. It was strange indeed to hear the lady of the Castle, who was notorious for her pride of birth and place, and who looked down on nearly all her neighbours as inferiors, actually making a laughing-stock of her own family tree.

'I have seen the Earl of Bothwell's picture in a book,' said Marjorie. 'He was dark and handsome, like your brother, Mr. Hugh.'

Miss Hetherington rose suddenly to her feet and took Marjorie by the arm.

'Say you that?' she exclaimed. 'Come wi' me, and I'll show you something.'

They crossed the garden together, passed through the door in the wall, and walking across the courtyard, approached the more

ancient part of the Castle. Between the two towers was an arch with a heavy oaken gate, which stood half open. Miss Hetherington passed in, followed by Marjorie. Passing through a narrow door to the right, they ascended a dark flight of stairs, and paused on a stone landing before a door of black oak. Miss Hetherington drew from her pocket a large old-fashioned key and opened the door. They entered, and found themselves in a small apartment, circular, like the tower of which it formed a part, and faintly lit by a high narrow window.

The floor was stone as well as the wall; but at one side of the room stood a large mahogany bed, with curtains of crimson and gold, worm-eaten and torn. Over an open fireplace, without a grate,

there hung an old oil-painting in a frame of tarnished gold.

'See there!' said the lady, pointing to the picture.

Marjorie looked, and started in wonder. It was the picture of a man in complete armour, leaning on a heavy two-handled sword. The flesh tints of the face were faded, leaving the countenance of death-like pallor; but out of the face, underneath the iron-grey hair just peeping from the helm, looked two black burning eyes, just like the eyes of the picture in the drawing-room. The semblance extended to the hard, coarse mouth, the knitted brows, the heavy, determined chin.

'It is Mr. Hugh!' cried Marjorie.

'It was painted, Marjorie, many a long year before my brother Hugh was born or thought o'. It's Bothwell himsel'!'

'The great Earl of Bothwell!'

'Aye, and nae other,' said the lady, gazing thoughtfully upward at the picture. 'Bothwell, the Queen's husband, and Mary Montgomery's lover. He loved Mary Montgomery till ambition gript him, and he sprang up like a wild beast to seize the Queen and the Crown. Mary Montgomery died heart-broken, they say; but the grim Earl didna forget her son. And out o' that bar sinister sprang the Hetheringtons o' Annandale.'

CHAPTER X.

CAUSSIDIÈRE AND JOHN SUTHERLAND.

EARLY in the afternoon, after a dismal lunch, *tête-à-tête* with Miss Hetherington, Marjorie returned home across the fields.

She was glad enough to escape from the gloomy house, and the equally gloomy conversation of its eccentric mistress; but she was sensible enough to feel that the great lady's interest in her was sincere and deep, and that the strange confidences of that day had their source in real sympathy

and kindliness of heart. Nevertheless, it was with a sigh of relief that she left the dark woods behind her, and came out again upon the pleasant meadows.

The sun was just beginning to sink as she passed through the village and approached the manse. As she did so, she saw Mr. Lorraine standing inside the churchyard gate in quiet conversation with the French teacher.

She entered the churchyard and joined them, the Frenchman saluting her with lifted hat as she approached.

'Ah, Marjorie, my bairn,' said the minister, 'you are home early. Did you walk back? I thought you would have stayed later, and that Miss Hetherington would have sent you home in the carriage after gloaming.'

Marjorie glanced at Caussidière, and met his eyes.

'She did not wish me to stay,' she answered, 'and I was glad to escape. But I see you and Monsieur Caussidière have made friends! I met him on the way, and he said he was coming here.'

'So he has told me,' said Mr. Lorraine. 'I have just been showing him over the kirk and through the graveyard, and now I have invited him to take pot-luck, as the English call it, this evening.'

'But it is so late, monsieur,' said Marjorie. 'How will you get back to Dumfries?'

'Did you not know?' returned the Frenchman, smiling, 'I am taking a leetle holiday, like yourself! I have engaged a

bed at the inn, and shall not return till the beginning of the week.'

They passed through the churchyard gate, and crossing the road, approached the manse, Mr. Lorraine leading the way. Since her conversation with Miss Hetherington, Marjorie was more constrained than ever with the Frenchman, whose manner had entirely changed—from one of thoughtful respect to another of glad assurance. In her own mind she heartily wished he had not come. But there he was, already in favour with her guardian, and she knew not what to say.

They entered the manse together, and Caussidière joined them at their simple evening meal. At a whispered command from the minister, Marjorie ran into the kitchen and assisted Mysie Simpson to pre-

pare tea, ham and eggs, and warn scones ; and when they were ready, she carried them in with her own hands.

Meantime Caussidière talked gaily with the minister, who seemed delighted with his company. He had travelled a good deal, was well acquainted with Latin literature, had known (or said he had known) many of the notabilities of his own country, and was altogether a man of information. He soon drew the minister out on his pet subjects—Scottish history and antiquities—and listened to him with great respect and deference. Mr. Lorraine was charmed, and forgot all about his simple suspicions when the Frenchman's name had been mentioned that morning.

Marjorie soon caught the contagion of so bright and congenial a presence. She

listened delighted while Caussidière rattled on. To her, as well as to the minister, their guest seemed a being from a brighter world.

When they touched on French politics, as was inevitable, Caussidière had a dark picture to draw of the French Empire, and his own persecution under it.

'The Emperor is a bandit!' he exclaimed; 'and he is stupid, look you, into the bargain. When the time comes—and it is near—he will fall like an idol from its pedestal, and then the world will wonder he was endured so long.'

'Yet they tell me,' said Mr. Lorraine, 'that France was never so prosperous as under his rule.'

'Believe me, it is not true. He has beautified a death's-head, he has made

Paris a temple of pleasure, but at what a price ! There is no purity, no morality now, in my unhappy country ; the tree is poisoned to the very roots. You, monsieur, who are a man of religion, will agree with me that the safeguard of a country is the sacredness of its domestic life, the holiness of its family ties ! *Eh bien*, he, the Emperor, has destroyed these. In Paris there is nothing but iniquity ; in the country at large, only ignorance and love of gold. What is a little temporal prosperity compared with that social purity which is so much more precious than all the riches of the world ?'

Words of wisdom truly, thought the simple minister, and beautiful as coming from the mouth of so young a man. And he had been taught to think all Frenchmen

so frivolous, so immoral even. He listened benignly, taken quite captive by the other's eloquence.

When tea was over they sat round the hearth. The minister lit his pipe and his guest a cigar. They were chatting pleasantly together, when Solomon Mucklebackit, who had been up the village on some household errand, quietly entered.

'Johnnie Sutherland's at the door. Will you see him?'

Marjorie started, for she had an instinctive dread of a meeting between the two young men; but the minister at once replied:

'Show him in, Solomon;' and as the sexton disappeared, he said to his guest, 'A young friend of ours, and a schoolfellow of my foster-daughter.'

The next moment Sutherland appeared. A look of surprise passed over his face as he saw the stranger, who rose politely, but, recovering himself, he shook the minister warmly by the hand.

'Welcome, Johnnie,' said Mr. Lorraine. 'Take a seat. Do you know Monsieur Caussidière? Then let me introduce you.'

Sutherland nodded to the Frenchman, who bowed courteously. Their eyes met, and then both looked at Marjorie.

'Monsieur Caussidière is my French teacher,' she said, smiling.

Sutherland looked somewhat puzzled, and sat down in silence. After an awkward pause, the minister began questioning him on his London experiences; he replied almost in monosyllables, and was altogether so bashful and constrained that Marjorie

could not avoid drawing an unfavourable comparison in her own mind between him and the fluent Frenchman.

'An artist, monsieur?' said the latter presently, having gathered the fact from some of Mr. Lorraine's questions. 'I used to paint, when I was a boy, but, finding I could not excel, I abandoned the attempt. To succeed in your profession is the labour of a life, and alas! so many fail.'

'That's true enough,' returned Sutherland, 'and when I see the great pictures I despair.'

'He paints beautifully, monsieur,' cried Marjorie, eager to praise her old friend. 'Does he not, Mr. Lorraine?'

The minister nodded benignly.

'Ah, indeed,' said Caussidière, with a

slight yawn. 'The landscape, monsieur, or the human figure?'

'I have tried both,' replied Sutherland. 'I think I like figure painting best.'

'Then you shall not go far to find a subject,' exclaimed Caussidière, waving his hand towards Marjorie. 'Ah, if I was an artist, I would like to paint mademoiselle. I have seen such a face, such eyes, and hair, in some of the Madonnas of the great Raphael.'

Marjorie cast down her eyes, then raised them again, laughing.

'He *has* painted me, and more than once; but I'm thinking he flattered the sitter. Miss Hetherington has one of the pictures up at the Castle.'

Caussidière fixed his eyes suspiciously upon Sutherland.

'Do you work for pleasure, monsieur, or for profit? Perhaps you are a man of fortune, and paint for amusement only?'

The question tickled the minister, who laughed merrily.

'I am only a poor man,' answered Sutherland, 'and paint for my bread.'

'It is an honourable occupation,' said Caussidière emphatically, though not without the suspicion of a covert sneer. 'At one time the artist was neglected and despised; now he is honoured for his occupation, and can make much money.'

The minister looked at Sutherland with a mild air of friendly patronage.

'Johnnie is almost self-taught,' he said, 'and has pursued his art against great difficulties. Why, it seems only yesterday that he was a wee callant, hanging round

the house for his playmate—our Marjorie. I always thought you cleverer than the rest, Johnnie, and knew you had a soul above weaving! Besides, your father is a gifted man, and you inherit his love for the beautiful.'

Sutherland did not reply. He felt the Frenchman's eyes fixed upon him, and he could not resist a certain feeling of irritation. To tell the truth, he was still puzzling his mind as to the meaning of the other's presence there, and wondering if it was in any way connected with Marjorie. And in Caussidière's manner, despite its studied politeness, there was an indescribable air of superiority, even of patronage, which he was beginning to resent.

The conversation continued by fits and

starts, but Sutherland's appearance seemed to have quite destroyed the gay freedom of the little party. At last Solomon re-appeared, and grimly announced that it was nine o'clock.

'We keep early hours,' explained Mr. Lorraine, 'and are all abed at ten o'clock.'

'Then I will go,' cried Caussidière, rising, 'but I shall call again. It is not often, in Scotland, one finds such pleasant company.'

'I will wish you good-night,' said the minister, 'unless before you go you would like to join us in family worship? Perhaps, however, being a French gentleman, you do not belong to our faith?'

'I am a staunch Protestant,' replied Caussidière, with a curious smile; 'and I will join you with pleasure.'

Sutherland decided to stay too, and when Mysie had been summoned from the kitchen, the little group, including her and Solomon, sat round the table, while Mr. Lorraine, with Bible and hymn-book before him, conducted evening prayer. A simple hymn was sung, a chapter read, and then all knelt down, while the minister prayed aloud.

During the whole ceremony, whenever Marjorie glanced at Caussidière, she found his eyes ardently fixed upon her—a fact which disturbed in no slight measure the fervency of her devotion. Once or twice Sutherland intercepted this look, and his liking for the Frenchman, lukewarm from the beginning, sank down to zero.

When all was done, 'good-night' was said and hands were shaken. Caussidière

shook the minister's hand cordially, and favoured Marjorie with a warm and lingering pressure, which left her more disturbed than ever. Then the two men walked out of the house together.

Solomon Mucklebackit shut the door behind them, and stalked into the sitting-room, where Marjorie and her guardian were standing, ready to retire for the night.

'Wha's yon black-nebbit French parrot?' he demanded abruptly.

The black 'neb' was a figurative allusion to Caussidière's moustache.

'Do you mean Monsieur Caussidière?' said the minister mildly. 'Solomon, my man, be good enough to speak of him more respectfully.'

Solomon gave his customary snort of defiance.

'Wha is he, meenister? What brings him doon here?'

'He is a French teacher of languages, Solomon, and Marjorie is his pupil.'

'I dinna like him!' cried the sexton decisively.

'Come, come, Solomon!'

'I'm telling ye I dinna like him! I saw him grinning to himsel' when you were reading oot frae the Book. He was laughin' at ye, meenister!'

Here Marjorie broke in good-humouredly:

'What ails you to-night, Solomon? I'm sure he is a pleasant gentleman, and a kindly.'

'Certainly,' said Mr. Lorraine, 'and one of extraordinary information.'

'Information,' repeated Solomon contemptuously. 'I tell you what it is,

meenister, if I saw a carle like yon hinging roon' the hoose after dark, I'd —I'd—deil tak' me if I wouldna *lock up the spoons!*'

And with this unexpected thunderclap, delivered with angry eyes and sonorous voice, Solomon Mucklebackit stalked out of the room, as he had entered it, refractory and determined.

Marjorie and the minister looked at each other in astonished perplexity, and then both forced a laugh. They were used to Solomon's ebullitions, which became more frequent as he grew older. Still, his angry words, ungracious and unreasonable as they were, did not fail to awaken uncomfortable feelings in them both.

* * * * *

Caussidière and Sutherland walked up the village side by side in the light of the moon, which was then at the full.

'You are a native of this place, monsieur?' said the Frenchman, after a long silence.

'Yes,' was the quiet reply.

'A charming place! and the people still more charming! You have known our old friend a long, long time?'

'Ever since I can mind.'

'And his daughter—his foster daughter, I should say? I have heard her story; it is romantic, monsieur; it touches my heart. Do you think her pretty?'

Sutherland started at the question, which was made with apparent nonchalance, but in reality with eager sus-

picion. He was silent, and the other continued:

'She is not like one of common birth; she has the grace of a lady. I was struck with her elegance when she first came to me for lessons. Poor child! To have neither father nor mother, to be a castaway! It is very sad.'

'She is happy and well-cared for,' sturdily answered Sutherland, who didn't like the turn the conversation was taking; 'and she has many true friends.'

'Yourself among the number, I am sure!' said Caussidière quickly.

'You are right there, at any rate,' returned Sutherland; and he added coldly, 'I'll wish you good-night.'

He stood before the gate of his father's cottage and held out his hand; the

Frenchman, however, did not attempt to take it, but kept his own hands in his coat pockets as he returned a polite 'Good-night.'

Caussidière strolled on till he heard Sutherland enter the cottage and close the door; then he returned, and stood listening at the gate.

There was a light in one of the windows, which was half-covered by a muslin blind.

After hesitating for a moment, he stole in across the garden, and kneeling on the ground, so that only the upper part of his face projected above the sill, he looked in.

Thus placed, he could see the interior of a humble apartment, in which several people, including his new acquaintance,

were seated, about to partake of a frugal supper.

James Sutherland, the blind weaver, sat in his working clothes at the head of the table; on his right hand was his son, opposite him Mrs. Sutherland, and on *her* right, little Jessie.

As Caussidière watched, the blind man rose reverently, and all heads were bent; his lips moved, and although no word was audible to the eavesdropper, he was evidently saying grace.

Caussidière had seen enough. He rose stealthily and crept back to the road.

Then he walked carelessly on, laughing aloud.

'A common weaver's son! almost a beggar!' he muttered to himself in his

own tongue. 'What a fool you were, Caussidière, to take the alarm!'

Well satisfied apparently with the entire state of things, the Frenchman strolled on to seek his night's rest at the village inn.

CHAPTER XI.

A SCOTTISH SUNDAY.

THE next day was Sunday—the solemn, not to say sanctimonious, Sabbath day of that people which, above all others, reverences the great work of creation.

Marjorie rose early, and wandering into the garden, found that it was still sunny weather. At eight o'clock the minister and she breakfasted together, waited upon by Mysie Simpson. Solomon Mucklebackit, dressed in a suit of black broadcloth dismal enough for a mute, with a shirt-

front of snowy whiteness, and a chimney-pot hat on his bald head, was already over at the church, seeing that everything was in order.

After breakfast Marjorie strolled to the front gate, and stood looking up and down the road and enjoying the sunshine. Presently Solomon came over from the churchyard and accosted her.

'What dae ye here, Marjorie? Looking oot again for yon birkie frae France?'

Marjorie flushed angrily.

'For shame, Solomon! How dare you speak to me like that? I'll tell Mr. Lorraine.'

'As ye please,' replied Solomon. 'If I dee for it, I'll speak my mind.'

At that very moment, as if to confirm the sexton in his suspicion, the figure of

Caussidière appeared, coming round a bend of the road.

'Talk o' the deil!' muttered Solomon, adding quickly, with a look of pious self-reproach, 'Lord forgie me for naming *him* on the Sabbath day!'

And with a scowl up the road, Solomon disappeared into the manse.

Marjorie did not know whether to stand her ground or retire. Before she could decide what to do, Caussidière came up and smilingly saluted her.

'Good morning, mademoiselle.'

'Good morning,' answered Marjorie, rather coldly.

'You are out early,' continued the young man. 'For myself, I could not sleep. The fresh country air acted on my brain like champagne, and kept me

wide awake. I was going for a morning stroll. Will you come with me?'

Marjorie shook her head.

'I have a great deal to do before the church begins. I—I cannot come.'

'I am sorry for that. But I shall see you by-and-by.'

'I think so,' she stammered in reply. 'Maybe! I can't tell.'

Caussidière looked at her keenly, and then uttered an exclamation.

'You are not angry with me, my child?'

'Angry, monsieur? Why do you ask that?'

'Because—ah, perhaps it is my foolishness, but I thought you seemed a little angry! But it is not so? No? Then I am happy again. Tell me, at what

hour 'does the service of your church begin ?'

'At eleven. You are coming, then!'

'Yes, since you are to be there.'

'I think there will be a good congregation,' said Marjorie, not noticing the words, nor the ardent look which accompanied them. 'Mr. Lorraine is a beautiful preacher; I am sure you will like him.'

'Perhaps—yet I am afraid.'

'Afraid ?'

'That if you are near I shall not hear much of the service.'

'Pray do not talk like that, monsieur; I am sure you do not mean it, and—and it is the Sabbath!'

Caussidière smiled; then, forcing his face to a grave expression, he said:

'Forgive me! I will try to be good;

but ah! you are more interesting to me than all the sermons in the world. Well, *au plaisir!* You know what that means, my dear scholar? It means this—to the pleasure of seeing you again. But I see you are impatient, and I will not trouble you any longer now.'

So he left her, having quite succeeded in disturbing the serenity of her seventh-day meditations. She turned back into the manse, struggling mentally, like a bird entangled in a net. The man fascinated and yet repelled her; his admiration flattered and pleased, yet irritated her. In her eyes he seemed handsomer and cleverer than ever, and where is the young maid over whom a handsome face, combined with the prestige of intellect, does not exercise a certain spell? She could understand

Sutherland's love for her; it seemed natural enough, and no great compliment; but that Monsieur Caussidière, a being altogether superior to her usual experience, and so much wiser and cleverer than herself, should be seriously captivated, awoke a strange sensation of surprise and pride. His manners, too, were so engaging—so gay and unaffected, and yet so full of profound respect. Alas for Marjorie! She had already forgotten Miss Hetherington's warning, and was beginning to yield to a growing fascination.

Her prediction turned out to be quite correct; there was an unusually large gathering that day in the little church. Whole families came in, in vehicles or on foot, from the neighbouring farms; the farmers in decent broadcloth, the farmers'

wives resplendent in new summer bonnets and other finery; and there were groups of labouring men and girls, all as brightly attired as their condition would allow. Then there was the doctor and his young wife, whom he had just brought from Fife; and other worthies of the parish, including Jock Steven of the inn, in a splendid embroidered waistcoat and the Gladstonian collar, known in Scotland as 'stick-ups.' James Sutherland, the blind weaver, occupied a seat, with his wife, son, and daughter by his side. Not far from them sat Caussidière, with his eyes turned towards Marjorie, whose place was just under the pulpit, close to the double row of forms occupied by the little lads and lasses of the village school.

Just as the bells ceased to ring, and Mr. Lorraine was issuing from the vestry, there

was a stir in the congregation, and all eyes were turned to see Miss Hetherington, who appeared at the door and came slowly towards the family pew. The old man-servant followed behind her, carrying her Bible and hymn-book. She moved to her place, and gave one flash of her dark eyes round the congregation, while the servant placed the books before her, and withdrew to another part of the church.

The service began. It is no part of my duty to describe it, or the sermon, though Mr. Lorraine was really, as Marjorie had asserted, a good preacher, and Solomon Mucklebackit, seated just under his master, spectacles on nose, had a way of delivering out the first words of the hymn, and of starting the air with his tuning-fork, which was sufficiently awe-inspiring. Once, as

Solomon struck the fork on the desk and applied it to his ear, the expression of his face was so comical, that Caussidière could not repress a smile; and at that moment, unfortunately, he was detected by the precentor, who scowled at him with a countenance of unutterable wrath.

It was a warm and sunny day, as I have said—one of those days in early spring when the lambs leap, and waters are loud, and boughs rustle, and the very grass seems stirring and alive. A beam of golden light coming through one of the church windows fell full on Marjorie Annan, and rested round her with a tremor of moted rays; and following the beam outward, the eye saw the boughs of a silver birch tree waving close to the pane, and beyond again, a peep of the blue sky.

A drowsy stillness, broken only by the measured tones of the preacher's voice, filled the sacred building.

The farmers and labouring people sat and listened—half hearing, half dozing—enjoying, after their six days of hard work, a delicious sense of rest. Girls crept closer to their lovers, drowsily happy. In the brightest place in the church, with her aureole round her, sat Marjorie Annan; and three pairs of eyes at least were constantly fixed upon her. The first pair belonged to young Sutherland, the second to the French visitor, the third to the eccentric mistress of Hethertington Castle.

Of these three individuals Caussidière was the most ill at ease. The sermon bored him, and he yawned again and again.

'This tiresome Scotland!' he thought to

himself, as he sleepily regarded Marjorie and watched the increeping sunshine. 'To think of sitting in a dreary church on such a day, instead of walking about in the sun and rejoicing in the new birth of nature! In Paris just now the streets are gay; there is life and music and pretty faces everywhere. But here—*corbleu!* If it was not for *la belle Marjorie* I should run away.'

Instead of running away, Caussidière went to sleep.

He was awakened by a loud noise, and looking round him, he saw the congregation moving towards the door, and Solomon Mucklebackit, from the precentor's desk, glaring down at him in renewed indignation. He rose languidly, and joined the stream of people issuing from the church.

Out in the churchyard the sun was

shining golden on the graves. At the gate several vehicles were waiting, including the brougham from Hetherington Castle.

As Caussidière moved down the path, he saw before him a small group of persons conversing—the blind weaver and his wife, John Sutherland, Marjorie, and the lady of the Castle. He passed by them with lifted hat, and moved on to the gate, where he waited.

'Who's yon?' asked Miss Hetherington, following him with her dark eyes.

'That is Monsieur Caussidière,' answered Marjorie, 'my French teacher.'

'Humph!' said the lady. 'Come awa' and introduce me.'

She walked slowly down the path, while Marjorie followed in astonishment, and coming right up to the Frenchman, she

looked him deliberately from head to foot. Not at all disconcerted, he took off his hat again, and bowed politely.

'Monsieur Caussidière,' said Marjorie, 'this is Miss Hetherington, of the Castle.'

Caussidière bowed again with great respect.

'I am charmed to make madame's acquaintance.'

To his astonishment, Miss Hetherington addressed him in his own tongue, which she spoke fluently, though with an unmistakable Scottish inflection.

'You speak English well, monsieur,' she said. 'Have you been long absent from your native land?'

'Ever since the crime of December,' he returned, also in French. 'But madame is almost a Frenchwoman—she speaks the

language to admiration. Ah, it is a pleasure to me, an exile, to hear the beloved tongue of France so perfectly spoken! You know France? You have lived there, madame?'

'I know it, and know little good of it,' cried the lady sharply. 'Are you like the rest of your countrymen, light and treacherous, believing in nothing that is good, spending their lives in vanity and sensual pleasure?'

Caussidière started in surprise; he was not accustomed to such plain speaking.

'Madame is severe,' he replied, with a sarcastic smile. 'She does not approve of the morals of my nation? No? Yet, *parbleu!* they compare not unfavourably with those of *pious* Scotland!'

This rebuff rather disconcerted the plain-

spoken lady, who was driven back upon her citadel of idiomatic Scotch.

'Think ye sae!' she said, with a harsh laugh. 'And what ken *you* o' pious Scotland, as ye call it? Hae you lived sae lang amongst us without finding man or woman to set your foreign lordship a good example?'

'Pardon me,' said Caussidière, in the same dry tone as before. 'I am foolish enough to place reliance, not upon my own observation, but upon—what you call—statistics!'

'Stateestics, quotha!' echoed Mrs. Hetherington. 'Weel, you're glib and clever enough, I dinna doot, to twist a bunch o' lily flowers into the shape o' a soo's lug—if ye ken what *that* is! You may sneer at our Scotch morals as ye please, my man,

but my certie! we hae taught your lordships many a sair lesson, besides the one ye learned sae weel at Waterloo!'

And she turned up the path impatiently, while the Frenchman shrugged his shoulders and looked loftily indignant. Marjorie, who had watched the preceding passage of arms with no little anxiety, not quite following the conversation so long as it took place in French, glanced imploringly at Caussidière.

'Don't mind Miss Hetherington,' she said, when that lady was out of hearing. 'What Mr. Lorraine says of her is true: her bark's waur than her bite, and she means no offence.'

'Who is she, my child? Oh, I remember, the eccentric old lady whom you visited yesterday.'

Marjorie nodded; and at that moment Mr. Lorraine came down the path, followed by Solomon, and met Miss Hetherington, who began talking to him vehemently.

'She is not very polite,' muttered Caussidière; 'and see, she is already abusing me to your guardian.'

He held out his hand.

'Good-bye! I shall see you, perhaps, later in the day.'

'Perhaps. Oh, monsieur, you are not offended?'

'Not at all,' replied Caussidière, though the look with which he regarded his late antagonist rather belied his words. 'I forgive her for your sake, my child!'

He looked so sad and injured that Marjorie quite pitied him and felt angry

with Miss Hetherington for having been so rude.

'What must he think of us?' she thought to herself as he walked away with a sigh. 'He, who is so polite to everybody, so unwilling to cause anyone a moment's pain!'

Without waiting any longer, she walked over to the manse. In a few minutes Mr. Lorraine joined her, and informed her that Miss Hetherington, in a high temper, had driven away home. Questioned as to what had taken place, Marjorie warmly defended Caussidière, and soon convinced her guardian that the rudeness had been all on the other side.

'Well, well,' said the minister, 'we must bear with her; in spite of her strange ways and violent temper she has a kind heart,

and you, my bairn, have no sincerer friend.'

Here Solomon Mucklebackit, who had been listening to the conversation, delivered his personal fiat.

'Mrs. Hetherington's right,' he said. 'She doesna like him, and she's a wise woman!'

'Solomon, my man,' said the minister, with some severity, 'we were not asking your opinion.'

'But ye'll get it, meenister. Are ye blin', that ye canna see what brings the birkie here? Na, na, Marjorie, you needna froon. He's coming after yoursel', and I wish he were a hunnerd miles awa'.'

'It's not *true!*' cried Marjorie, her eyes filling with indignant tears. 'Oh, Mr. Lorraine!'

'Solomon, leave the room! You have no right to use such language!' exclaimed the minister indignantly.

'I hae this right,' returned Solomon, moving to the door, 'that the bairn's my foster as weel as yours, meenister. I'm speaking for Marjorie's *gude!* You can order me frae the room if you please—aye, and turn me frae the hoose—but I'll say this in your teeth—"I dinna like him, and I dinna trust him, and 'twas an ill win' that blew him doon here."'

He passed out of the room, but the next moment thrust in his head, saying:

'And he went soond asleep in the middle o' your ain sermon, the awtheist! I had a mind to fling the muckle hymn-book at his heid!'

* * * * *

Marjorie did not go to church again that day. She had a headache and kept her room. It was altogether a gloomy afternoon. Mr. Lorraine, secretly troubled in his mind, had difficulty in concentrating his thoughts on his religious duties, and Solomon preserved an invincible taciturnity. So the day passed away, and evening came.

There was no evening service, for Mr. Lorraine was too infirm to conduct three services in one day. After a dismal tea, to which Marjorie came down, the minister sat reading a volume of sermons, and presently Marjorie left the room, put on her hat, and strolled into the garden.

It was a beautiful evening, and the moon was rising over the far-off hills. With her head still aching wearily, the girl wandered out upon the road and into the

churchyard. She crept close to the western wall and looked for a long time at one of the tombstones. Then, sighing deeply, she came out and strolled up the village.

The bright weather and the fresh air enticed her on and on till she came to the rural bridge above Annan Water.

All was still and peaceful; not a sound, not a breath disturbed the Sabbath silence. She leaned over the stone parapet and looked sadly down.

Her thoughts were wandering far away —flowing, flowing with the murmuring stream. She had fallen into a waking dream, when she heard a footstep behind her. She started and uttered a low cry as she saw a dark figure approaching in the moonlight.

CHAPTER XII.

THE GREEN-EYED MONSTER.

THE figure advanced rapidly, and in a moment Marjorie recognised her tutor.

'Monsieur Caussidière!' she cried.

'Yes,' returned the Frenchman quietly, 'it is I!'

He took her hand in his, and found it cold and trembling.

'I have frightened you,' he said.

'Yes, monsieur; I was startled because I did not hear you coming, and I seemed to be far away.'

'You were dreaming, Marjorie?'

'Yes, monsieur, I was dreaming.'

She did not notice that he called her by her Christian name; had she done so, she would have taken little heed. It seemed but natural that he should do so; she was so small and young, he so much beyond her both in years and education; and, indeed, was she not known to everyone as plain Marjorie Annan?

She seemed strangely sad and pre-occupied to-night. After the Frenchman had joined her she relapsed into her former dream; she folded her arms upon the bridge again, and fixed her sad eyes upon the flowing river. Caussidière, partaking of her mood, looked downward too.

'You love the Water, Marjorie?'

'Yes; it is my kith and kin.'

'You have been here for hours, have you not? I sought you at the manse in vain.'

'I was not here, monsieur. I was in the kirkyard among the graves.'

'Among the graves?' returned the Frenchman, looking anxiously at her. 'A strange place for *you* to wander in, my child! It is only when we have seen trouble and lost friends that we seek such places. For me it would be fitting perhaps, but for you it is different. You are so young, and should be so happy.'

'Ah, yes!' sighed Marjorie. 'I am happy enough.'

'And yet you sadden the days that should be brightest by wandering near the dead. Why did you go to the churchyard, little one?'

'Why, monsieur? To see my mother's grave.'

'Your mother's grave? I thought you did not know your mother.'

'They *say* she was my mother,' returned Marjorie quickly. 'She was found drowned in Annan Water — was it not dreadful, monsieur?—and she was buried yonder in the kirkyard when I was a little child.'

'And you think she was your mother?'

'They say so, monsieur, but I do not think it is true.'

'No?'

'I have gone to her grave and stayed by it, and tried to think they are right, but I cannot—I aye come away as I did to-night and look at Annan Water, and feel it more my kin.'

'Marjorie!'

'Yes, monsieur!'

'I fancy you are right, child; perhaps your mother lives.'

'Ah, you think that?'

'More; she is perhaps watching over you, though she cannot speak. She may reveal herself some day.'

'You believe so, monsieur?' repeated Marjorie, her face brightening with joy.

'It is very probable, my child. You are not of the *canaille*, Marjorie. When I first saw you, I knew that; then I heard your story, and it interested me. I thought, "We are strangely alike—we are like two of a country cast adrift in a foreign land, but our destinies seem to be one. She is exiled from her kindred; I am exiled from my home. She has a kindly heart and will understand me; we must be

friends." We will be friends, Marjorie, will we not?'

He held out his hand, and the girl took it.

'You are very good, monsieur,' she answered simply.

'Then you must treat me as a friend indeed, little one!' he answered. 'I will take no money for your lessons; it is a pleasure for me to teach you, and—and Mr. Lorraine is not rich.'

'Mr. Lorraine?' said Marjorie, opening her blue eyes; 'it is not Mr. Lorraine who pays for my schooling, but Miss Hetherington.'

'Is that so?'

'Yes, that is so. Mr. Lorraine did not wish to have me taught beyond my station; but Miss Hetherington said I must learn.'

Caussidière seemed to reflect profoundly.

'Miss Hetherington is a philanthropic lady, then?'

'Do you think so, monsieur?'

'Do not *you* think so, Marjorie, since she is universally kind and generous?'

'Ah,' returned Marjorie, 'I do not think she is always generous, monsieur; but she is very kind to *me*. Why, she has almost kept me ever since I was a child.'

To this the Frenchman did not reply. He leaned forward carelessly, as if dreamily watching the water, but in reality he was stealthily watching Marjorie's face. A new light had come into Marjorie's eyes, and her brow was knit. Presently he spoke again, returning to the subject, which seemed to possess a strange interest for him. He reminded Marjorie of the encounter

between himself and Miss Hetherington that afternoon, and by a little quiet questioning he got her to talk unrestrainedly of the strange relations between Miss Hetherington and herself. Thus he learned that the lady, not content with helping Marjorie, had given fifty pounds for a picture of her, 'though,' Marjorie hurriedly explained, 'it was more to patronize Mr. Sutherland than because she wanted the picture.'

'Which proves that she is a philanthropist after all,' said the Frenchman quietly. '*Mon Dieu*, I am sorry I have offended the lady! I adore all people who do good deeds.'

'You have offended her, monsieur?'

'I fear so, my child. She was violent against my country, which I could not hear abused. I defended the absent, *voilà tout!*'

Again there was silence between them; the Frenchman seemed somewhat disturbed; he lit a cigar and watched Marjorie through the clouds of smoke. Presently the clock in the church tower struck the hour, and Marjorie started.

'I must be walking home,' she said.

She began to move across the bridge, the Frenchman keeping beside her; he took her hand and placed it on his arm, but Marjorie quickly drew it away again.

'*You* are not angry with me?' he asked in alarm.

'No, indeed, monsieur, I am not angry, but——' she paused, confused.

'Well?' said he.

'It would not look right,' said Marjorie desperately; 'we are so different — you and I.'

'Ah, I understand,' he replied sadly; 'a poor exiled Frenchman is no fit companion for you—you will give him a word in private, and the poor devil clutches at it as a starving dog would clutch at a bone; in public he is no longer your friend.'

'Indeed, monsieur, you misunderstand,' said Marjorie quickly. 'I did not mean that; I—I——'

'Pardon, my child! I am a brute to distress you; but I am not what I was, Marjorie: much sorrow and adverse fortune have made me sad, and almost bitter—yes, alas! made me doubt my best friends; but I will doubt you no more, for you are my one comfort in this dreary land.'

They had been walking steadily onward, and now they reached the door of the

inn. Marjorie paused and held forth her hand.

'Good night, monsieur,' she said.

'Good night!—shall I not walk with you to the manse, little one?'

Marjorie shook her head.

'I would rather walk there alone.'

The Frenchman shrugged his shoulders.

'*Eh bien!* since you wish it I will think you are right. Good-night, my little friend, and *au revoir*.'

He took the hand which she had extended towards him, raised it to his lips, then patted it as if he had been patting the fingers of a child; it was this air of fatherly friendliness which made her trust him, and which won for him all the sympathy of her affectionate heart. It was so terrible to be alone, thought Marjorie;

to be exiled from his country, his home, his friends. She pitied everyone in trouble, and she pitied and sympathized with Caussidière above all, never once dreaming that pity is a dangerous thing, and sometimes turns to love.

When Caussidière imprinted a kiss upon her hand she neither blushed nor drew it away; but she said softly:

'Good-night, monsieur, God bless you!' at which the Frenchman kissed her hand again, then, turning quickly, entered the inn.

Marjorie turned too, feeling her kind little heart overflowing, and walked away down the moonlit road. She had not gone many steps when she was abruptly joined by a man. She did not start nor seem surprised; indeed, while she was

parting with the Frenchman she had seen John Sutherland watching her from the opposite side of the road.

'Good evening, Johnnie,' said Marjorie quietly. 'Why did you not come forward and speak to Monsieur Caussidière?'

The young man started, but made no answer.

'Johnnie, what is wrong?' she asked.

He paused and looked at her.

'Marjorie,' he said, 'tell me what you were doing with that man?'

It was no time for his reproaches; her whole soul rose in revolt.

'With that man?' she repeated angrily. 'Do you mean with Monsieur Caussidière?'

'Yes, with that villainous Frenchman,' he returned, driven recklessly onward by

his anger. 'Why are you always in his company, Marjorie Annan ?'

Marjorie drew herself proudly up. Had the Frenchman seen her then, he would have had little doubt as to the stock whence she came.

'I am in his company because I am his friend,' she answered proudly. 'Yes, his friend; and as his friend I will not hear him insulted. Good-night.'

She walked quickly away, but in a moment he was again beside her.

'Marjorie, will you not listen to me ?'

'No, I will not,' returned the girl angrily. 'Whatever you have to say against Monsieur Caussidière you shall not say to me. He was right; you are all against him, and you are the worst of all. Do you think it just or kind to abuse a

man simply because he is a stranger and unfortunate? What has Monsieur Caussidière ever done to *you* that you should dislike him so much?'

The young man stared at her flushed cheeks and angry eyes; then he exclaimed:

'Marjorie, answer me! Tell me it's not possible that you care for yon man?'

She flushed crimson and turned away.

'I care for anyone,' she answered evasively, 'who is alone, and who wants a friend. Monsieur Caussidière has been very kind to me, and—and I am sorry for him.'

'You are more than that, Marjorie—but take care, for I know he is a scoundrel.'

'How dare you say so?' returned Marjorie. 'You are a coward, Johnnie

Sutherland. If he were here you would not speak like that.'

'I would say the same to him as to you. If he were not a scoundrel he would not entice you from your home.'

This was too much for Marjorie. She uttered an indignant exclamation, and, without deigning to reply, hastened rapidly away. This time he did not hasten after her; and almost before he could recover from his surprise she had entered the manse door.

She found them preparing for evening prayers.

Both Mr. Lorraine and Solomon were getting uneasy at her absence. Solomon, the moment the load of anxiety was lifted from his heart, began to rate her soundly, and asked her where she had been.

'To the kirkyard first,' she answered, 'then to Annan Bridge.'

'Alane?' asked Solomon, who guarded her like a very watch-dog.

'No,' answered Marjorie, 'not alone.'

'And wha might have been your companion?'

'I had two,' she replied. 'Johnnie Sutherland and Monsieur Caussidière.'

'Monsieur Caussidière?' repeated Solomon contemptuously; 'the sleekit French scoondrel wha laughed at the meenister's prayers, and sleepit owre the meenister's sermon? Braw company for a Sabbath night, I'm thinkin', and for Marjorie Annan. Ye'll pray for Monsieur Caussidière mayhap, and muckle gude your prayers will do *him*.'

In one thing Solomon was right—Mar-

jorie *did* pray for Monsieur Caussidière; for since she found that every voice was raised against him, her little heart warmed to him the more. So she prayed for him—for the man whom she believed to be fully deserving of her friendship, perhaps of her love.

CHAPTER XIII.

CAUSSIDIÈRE FINDS A CLUE.

WHEN the Frenchman sat at breakfast the next morning he was thinking a good deal of Marjorie Annan, and, strange to say, the next individual mingled up intimately in his reflections was Miss Hetherington of the Castle.

'There is a mystery,' he said to himself, as he sipped his chocolate and ate his bread-and-butter; 'and if they were to search all England, and perhaps *la belle France*, they would not find a man better able to unravel

a mystery than myself. The old witch was a fool to abuse me ; she may have cause to regret it before our acquaintance shall cease. Let me see. Why did she become violent? Ah, I have it! Because I said the morals of France would compare with those of bonnie Scotland. It was a random shot, but it told, it seems.'

He rose, walked to the window, and looked out.

He could see in the distance the dim outline of the Castle woods.

'A charming place,' he continued ; 'old and crusty, like its mistress. If I were an artist now! But, alas! my education in that respect has been neglected, which I regret now for the first time in my life. *Parbleu!* I must think, for the fault must be remedied. Since I am not an artist, and

cannot sketch the Castle, I must be interested as an amateur in something which the Castle contains.'

He left the window, returned to the table, and proceeded leisurely to finish his breakfast.

'Marjorie!' he said. 'Marjorie Annan! *Ma foi!* but it is a pretty name, and she is a pretty creature who bears it; and she is of gentle birth, too—every look and gesture tells me that! How things are changing! I had thought her a mere plaything; I had thought her fit to make the dull hours pass pleasantly for me till such time as I could return to my native land—but it seems she may be destined for something better. Well, we shall see.'

There remained but four days before the classes reopened, and the Frenchman re-

solved that those days should not be spent idly. To a casual observer it would seem that he did nothing, for the great part of his time seemed to be spent in wandering about the meadows and lanes lazily, cigar in mouth, enjoying the spring sunshine. Sometimes during those strolls he met Marjorie, and had some pleasant talk with her; sometimes he called at the manse to chat with Mr. Lorraine, receiving a scowl from Solomon as he came or went. Strange to say, at neither of these interviews, either with Marjorie or her foster-father, did he ever again mention Miss Hetherington's name.

But, on the other hand, Miss Hetherington was becoming strangely interested in *him.*

After that scene with Marjorie on Sunday

night, Sutherland was in a state of despair; for two days he walked about in misery; on the third day his resolution was fixed, and he determined to act. He went up to the Castle and sought an interview with Miss Hetherington.

'Weel, Johnnie Sutherland,' began the lady, regarding him grimly, 'what's wrong now?'

Five minutes before, the young man had been resolute, but once he found himself under the lady's baleful eye he grew extremely ill at ease.

'Miss Hetherington,' he began, blushing and looking strangely uncomfortable, 'I—I wished to speak to you.'

'Of course, of course,' replied the lady impatiently, 'else why did ye come to Annandale? What's your news?'

'I think—in fact, I am sure—you are interested in Marjorie Annan.'

'Call ye *that* news? Disna a' the glen ken I'm interested in the lassie, because she's good and bonnie? What more?'

'You would be sorry if she came to harm?'

In a moment the lady's face changed.

'Deil take the lad!' she exclaimed; 'what's he driving at? Where's the harm that's threatening Marjorie Annan?'

'The Frenchman!' said Sutherland. 'She is being wooed away from her home by the Frenchman.'

'What do you mean?' asked the lady sharply. 'What fool's tale is this that ye bring to me, Johnnie Sutherland?'

Emboldened at last, Sutherland spoke out. He told of the scene which he had had

with Marjorie, of her anger against himself, and of her constant meetings with the stranger. Miss Hetherington listened with averted head, and laughed grimly when he had done.

'I see how it is,' she said; 'tis the old tale; twa lads and a lassie. But I dinna like the Frenchman, Johnnie, no more than yoursel'. I'll speak with Mr. Lorraine, maybe; 'tis his work to keep the bairnie right, though he does his work ill, I'm thinking. You're a good lad, Johnnie; and as to Marjorie, she's a short-sighted eediot not to see wha's her friend.'

She spoke lightly and cheerfully; but the moment Sutherland disappeared, both her face and manner changed.

'The lad was right,' she said. 'Love has made him keen-sighted, and he has told me

truth. Marjorie is in danger. Now is the time when she needs the care o' kind folk to keep her frae the one false step that ruins all. Marjorie Annan, what shall I do for you, my bairn?'

She stood for a time meditating; then she looked at her watch, and found it was still early in the day; she summoned her old servant, ordered her carriage, and a quarter of an hour later was driving away towards the town of Dumfries.

On the way, a few hundred yards from the manse door, she saw the Frenchman nonchalantly strolling onward in the direction of the manse. Monsieur Caussidière swept off his hat and bowed almost to the ground; but the lady stared sternly at him and made no sign.

A strange smile lit the Frenchman's

face as the clumsy old carriage swept on.

'Madame,' he muttered, 'you do not know what you do when you declare open war with Caussidière!'

He turned and strolled on in another direction—across the field and through the lanes towards Annandale Castle. After the first half-mile his face brightened, his step quickened, and he walked right up to the door like a man who has a fixed purpose in view.

Caussidière walked boldly forward and pulled the bell. The first summons produced no effect at all; on its being repeated, however, the old serving-man shuffled to the door, and, seeing a stranger, asked in somewhat sharp tones what he sought.

The Frenchman's face wore its most winning smile as he replied suavely:

'I seek Madame—or rather I should say Mademoiselle——'

The old man's face was black as thunder. Foreigners were by no means popular in Annandale.

'If you are thinking to see Miss Hetherington, ye'll no be gratified. She's awa' till Dumfries and beyont, and she'll no be hame till nicht.'

The Frenchman looked disappointed.

'I am sorry,' he said. 'I should have liked to see the lady. When do you think she will be back, my friend?'

'The nicht. What dae ye want wi' her?'

'Very little after all, you will say. I merely wished to be allowed to inspect the northern tower of the Castle.'

'Ye wish to gang wannerin' ower the hoose? It canna be dune.'

'You are right, my friend,' returned the Frenchman blandly. 'Of course it cannot be done, since the mistress is away.'

'If the mistress, as ye are pleased to ca' her, was ben the hoose it would be a' ane. It couldna be done. A bonnie thing, on my life, to turn Annandale intill a show-hoose for a' the carles i' the toon!'

The Frenchman put his finger and thumb into his waistcoat pocket, and drew forth something, which he placed in the old man's hand.

'I am sorry to have troubled you, my friend,' he said, 'but since you say the interior of the Castle is not on view, perhaps I may be permitted to walk for ten minutes in the garden?'

The old man looked down; there in his withered palm lay a golden piece of money. He started and looked again. At first he felt impelled to give it back; then his lean fingers closed over the prize, and with a grunt he put it in his pocket.

'May I be permitted,' said Caussidière, 'to walk in the grounds?'

'Of coorse, of coorse,' returned the old fellow testily, 'what for no? The grounds are open till ane as well as till anither!'

'Thanks, my good friend.'

The Frenchman lifted his hat in his most courteous manner, and was about to move away, when the voice of the old servant arrested him.

'Will you come back when Miss Hetherington's hame? I dinna ken, but maybe she'd let ye ben the hoose.'

'No, I cannot return.

'And wherefore no?'

'Because on the morrow I return to my work in town. This was an idle day, and I had hoped to spend it pleasantly. However, since mademoiselle will not trust you——'

'And wha dare say *that?*' broke in the old man angrily; 'wha dare say that Sandie Sloan canna be trusted by the Mistress o' Annandale?'

'Pardon me, good friend,' interrupted the Frenchman, more blandly than before; 'I was about to say, but you interrupted me, that mademoiselle would not trust you to show the Castle.'

'And wha might it be that set *that* tale aboot? No show the hoose? have I no shown the hoose to folk before

the day? Ay, and if I had a mind I could show it till yersel', tho' you think I canna.'

The old fellow evidently wanted to be taken at his word, and the Frenchman immediately gratified him.

'Thanks, good friend,' he said, as he stepped into the hall.

The plunge once taken, the deed was done. The Frenchman had paid liberally for civility, and he was about to get his money's worth. His polite manners, coupled with his liberality, soon cleared away the old man's prejudice against foreigners.

'Maybe,' said he, remembering the gold which lay in his pocket, 'noo you're here, you'd like to see a' the hoose. The Lord kens there isna muckle to see; the auld

place is fading awa', like the line o' the Hetheringtons.'

'I have heard,' returned the Frenchman, 'that Miss Hetherington was the last of the family.'

'And you hae heard richt. 'Twill be an end to a' the Hetheringtons when she gangs her gait.'

'It is strange, is it not, that she never married?'

Caussidière as he spoke looked curiously at his companion, but the old man's face did not change.

'Aye,' he returned, 'there was ance a time when folk thought she *would* mairry. She gangit awa' to London toon; after she came hame there were letters through the post for her ilka day. Ae day Mr. Hugh took the letters frae the postman wi' his ain

hand, and that nicht we heard moans and cries at mirk. In the morning the mistress was sent awa', driven forth by Mr. Hugh, we thought; and she was awa' for months.'

'And after she returned?'

'Aye, but no' till she had promised to be obedient till her brither. Then she cam' to Annandale, but she was a changed woman. She bore Mr. Hugh's mark upon her face then, as she bears it noo!'

'And that is long ago?'

'Aye, seventeen years.'

'Seventeen years!' thought the Frenchman. 'That is the very age of Marjorie Annan!'

It was a strange coincidence. Caussidière kept it in his mind as he followed the footsteps of his guide.

They passed from room to room, finding

each one gloomier than its predecessor. The old man pointed out the pictures and various relics which he thought might be interesting, and Caussidière glanced about him with eyes like a hawk. As they passed onward his face became less radiant; a frown of weariness and disappointment began to cloud his brow. At length the whole of the Castle had been examined, and the two men began to descend the quaint oaken stairs. Caussidière, lingering as if in no haste to be gone, still talked pleasantly, and glanced impatiently about him.

Presently they passed the half-open door of a kind of boudoir. Caussidière, who had looked keenly in, paused suddenly.

'Surely,' he said, 'I know that face!'

The old man went forward, and pushed

open the door, and the Frenchman, following closely upon him, entered the room, and stood thoughtfully regarding the object which had arrested his attention. It was a picture, a good-sized painting, which hung above the mantelpiece.

'Tis Marjorie Annan,' explained the old man, 'foster-daughter to the minister. 'Twas painted by Johnnie Sutherland. The mistress bought it because she likes the lassie, and because it has a favour o' hersel'.'

The Frenchman stared.

'Like Miss Hetherington ?' said he.

'Aye, like hersel',' returned the old man. 'You'd no be denying it if you saw the picture in that press. 'Tis Miss Hetherington at seventeen or eighteen years of age!'

I should like to see the picture.'

Aweel, aweel, you should see it; but the press is locked, and Mysie has the key.'

'You could not get it, I suppose?'

'Aye, I could get it,' returned Sandie, still under the influence of the Frenchman's gold. 'Bide awhile and you shall see.'

He shuffled off, leaving the Frenchman alone.

The moment he was gone, Caussidière's face and manner underwent a complete change. He sprang upon the room, as it were, with cat-like fury, turned over papers, opened drawers, ransacking everything completely. At last he came upon a drawer which would not open; it was in a writing cabinet, the counterpart of one he had at home; he pressed a hidden spring: in a

moment the drawer flew open, and Caussidière was rapidly going over the papers which it contained.

Suddenly he started, drew forth a paper, opened and read it. A gleam of light passed over his face. He folded the paper, thrust it into the inner pocket of his coat, and closed the drawer. When the old man returned with his key, he found Caussidière with his hands behind him, quietly regarding the picture of Marjorie Annan.

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